

# HELPFUL HINTS



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PRACTICAL ENGLISH SERIES





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**HELPFUL HINTS *on*  
WRITING *and* READING**

*Compiled by* **GRENVILLE KLEISER**

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**FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE  
OF GRENVILLE KLEISER'S  
CORRESPONDENCE COURSE  
STUDENTS**

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## TO THE STUDENT

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**AMBITIOUS** pupils in every art are desirous of knowing the best that has been thought and said upon their particular subject. In the following pages will be found, in concise form, many really important utterances on English style. The student is urged to read each of these extracts, and carefully to note those suggestions which are most applicable to his own case. Liberal underscoring of passages is recommended.

**GRENVILLE KLEISER.**





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**HELPFUL HINTS  
ON  
WRITING AND READING**





## A DEFINITION OF STYLE

Thought and speech are inseparable from each other. Matter and expression are parts of one: style is a thinking out into language. This is what I have been laying down, and this is literature; not *things*, not the verbal symbols of things; not, on the other hand, mere *words*; but thoughts exprest in language.

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

## ANOTHER DEFINITON OF STYLE

Style is the manner in which ideas are exprest. Style is not in the mind—it is the mind. As Dr. Johnson said of the wits of Charles the Second's reign: "Themselves they studied—as they felt they writ." A bitter fountain can not give forth sweet water. According to the quality of the information in the treasure-house of the understanding will be the style—scant or plentiful in words, clear or confused in expression, vivacious or dull, yielding ideas leaden or golden, gems of paste or diamonds rich and rare. When a man can, like Cobbett, talk with his pen, his style is disclosed. It is said of John Morley that the chief features of this style are "per-

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fect sanity and reasonableness." Its special charm "simplicity and courtesy." His hold upon his reader is his "scholarship and sincerity." He has "urbanity and wit," still rare in literature."

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

### VARIETIES OF STYLE

If we examine the compositions of any two individuals on the same subject, we shall generally find that, not only do their respective sentiments differ, but also their modes of expressing those sentiments. This is no more than natural. We must expect the thoughts and words of men to differ similarly with their actions and dispositions. Now, the peculiar manner in which a writer expresses his thoughts by means of words is called **STYLE**—a word derived from the Latin *stylus*, the name of a pointed steel instrument employed by the Romans in writing on their waxen tablets. Yet, while the mental peculiarities of most writers are apparent in their diction, there are some general distinctive features which enable us to divide their various styles into different classes as follows:

A *dry style* excludes ornament of every kind. Aiming only to be understood, it takes no trouble to please either the fancy or the ear. Such a style is tolerable in didactic writing alone, and even

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there only solidity of matter and perspicuity of language enable us to endure it. This is so generally felt that we have but few specimens of a purely dry style. Aristotle's may be mentioned among the most striking; and, in modern times, Berkeley has perhaps approached it as nearly as any other writer.

A *plain style* rises one degree above that last described. While the plain writer is at no pains to please us with ornament, he carefully avoids disgusting us with harshness. In addition to perspicuity, which is the only aim of the dry writer, he studies precision, purity, and propriety. Such figures as are naturally suggested and tend to elucidate his meaning, he does not reject; while such as merely embellish he avoids as beneath his notice. To this class of writers Locke and Swift belong.

Next in order is the *neat style*. Here ornaments are employed, but not those of the most elevated or sparkling kind; they are appropriate and correct, rather than bold and glowing. Beauty of composition is sought to be attained rather by a judicious selection and arrangement of words than by striking efforts of imagination. The sentences employed are of moderate length, and carefully freed from superfluities. This style is adapted to every species of writing; to the letter, the essay, the sermon, the law-paper, and even the most abstract treatise.

Advancing a step, we come to the *elegant style*; which possesses all the beauty that ornament can add, without any of the drawbacks arising from its improper or excessive use. It may be regarded as the perfection of style. "An elegant writer," says Blair, "is one who pleases the fancy and the ear, while he informs the understanding; and who gives us his ideas clothed with all the beauty of expression, but not overcharged with any of its misplaced finery." Such a one preeminently is Addison; and such, tho in a less degree, are Pope, Temple, and Bolingbroke.



A *florid style* is one in which ornament is everywhere employed. The term is used with a twofold signification—for the ornaments may spring from a luxuriant imagination and have a solid basis of thought to rest upon: or, as is too often the case, the luxuriance may be in words alone and not in fancy; the brilliancy may be merely superficial, a glittering tinsel, which, however much it may please the shallow-minded, can not fail to disgust the judicious. As first defined, this style has been employed by several distinguished writers with marked success; among these the most prominent is Ossian, whose poems consist almost entirely of bold and brilliant figures. But it is only writers of transcendent genius that can thus indulge in continued ornament with any hope of success. Inferior minds inevitably fall into the second kind of floridity alluded to above, than which nothing is more contemptible. Vividness of imagination in the young often betrays them into this fault; it is one, however, which time generally corrects, and which is therefore to be preferred in the opposite extreme. "Luxuriance," says Quintilian, "can easily be cured; but for barrenness there is no remedy."

Careful revision is the best means of correcting an over-florid style. Unnecessary words must be stricken out, and even the whole sentence must sometimes be remodeled. On the ornamental parts, in particular, the file must be freely used. Figures which are not in all respects chaste and appropriate to the subject, must be unceremoniously removed. To write frequently on familiar themes will be found another effective means of correcting excessive floridity. In such exercises, the inappropriateness of too much ornament will be obvious to the writer himself, and the effort made to repress it will have a beneficial effect on all his compositions.

G. P. QUACKENBOS



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### WHEN FOREIGN WORDS ARE ALLOWABLE

It is indeed well-nigh impossible to conceive anything more gradual than the steps by which a foreign word is admitted into the full rights of an English one; and thus the process of its incoming often eludes our notice altogether. It appears to me that we may best understand this, by fixing our attention upon some single word, which at this very moment is in the course of becoming English. I know no better example than the French word "prestige" will afford. "Prestige" manifestly supplies a want in our tongue; it expresses something which no single word in English could express; which could only be expressed by a long circumlocution; being that magic influence on those around, which past successes, as the pledge and promise of future ones, breed. The word has thus naturally come to be of very frequent use by good English writers; for they do not feel that in employing it they are deserting as good or a better word of their own.

TRENCH

## THE IDEA OF BEAUTY

Notwithstanding the great variety of qualities, physical, intellectual, and moral, to which the word beauty is applicable, I believe it will be admitted that, in its primitive and most general acceptation, it refers to objects of sight. As the epithets sweet and delicious literally denote what is pleasing to the palate, and harmonious what is pleasing to the ear; as the epithets soft and warm denote certain qualities that are pleasing in objects of touch or of feeling, so the epithet beautiful literally denotes what is pleasing to the eye. All these epithets, too, it is worthy of remark, are applied transitively to the perceptions of other senses. We speak of sweet and of soft sounds; of warm, of delicious, and of harmonious coloring, with as little impropriety as of a beautiful voice, or of a beautiful piece of music. Mr. Burke himself has somewhere spoken of the soft green of the soul. If the transitive applications of the word beauty be more numerous and more heterogeneous than those of the words sweetness, softness, and harmony, is it not probable that some account of this peculiarity may be derived from the comparative multiplicity of those perceptions of which the eye is the common organ? Such, accordingly, is the very simple principle on which the

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following speculations proceed; and which it is the chief aim of these speculations to establish. . . .

The first ideas of beauty formed by the mind are, in all probability, derived from colors. Long before infants receive any pleasures from the beauties of form or of motion (both of which require, for their perception, a certain effort of attention and of thought), their eye may be caught and delighted with brilliant coloring, or with splendid illumination. I am inclined, too, to suspect, that in the judgment of a peasant, this ingredient of beauty predominates over every other, even in his estimate of the perfections of the female form; and, in the inanimate creation, there seems to be little else which he beholds with any rapture. . . .

From the admiration of colors, the eye gradually advances to that of forms; beginning first with such as are most obviously regular. Hence the pleasure which children, almost without exception, express, when they see gardens laid out after the Dutch manner; and hence the justness of the epithet childish, or puerile, which is commonly employed to characterize this species of taste; one of the earliest stages of its progress both in individuals and in nations.

When, in addition to the pleasures connected with colors, external objects present those which arise from certain modifications



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of form, the same name will be naturally applied to both the causes of the mixed emotion. The emotion appears, in point of fact, to our consciousness, simple and uncompounded, no person being able to say, while it is felt, how much of the effect is to be ascribed to either cause, in preference to the other; and it is the philosopher alone, who ever thinks of attempting, by a series of observations and experiments, to accomplish such an analysis. The following expressions of Vergil show how easily the fancy confounds these two ingredients of the beautiful under one common epithet. "*Edera formosior alba.*" "*O formose puer, nimium ne crede colori.*" That the adjective *formosus* originally referred to the beauty of form alone, is manifest from its etymology; and yet it would appear that, even to the correct taste of Vergil, it seemed no less applicable to the beauty of color. . . .

Similar remarks may be extended to the word *Beauty*, when applied to motion, a species of beauty which may be considered as in part a modification of that form; being perceived when a pleasing outline is thus sketched, or traced out to the spectator's fancy. The beauty of motion has, however, beside this, a charm peculiar to itself; more particularly, when exhibited by an animated being; above all, when exhibited by an individual of our own species. In these cases it



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produces that powerful effect, to the unknown cause of which we give the name of brace; an effect which seems to depend, in no inconsiderable degree, on the additional interest which the pleasing form derives from its fugitive and evanescent existence; the memory dwelling fondly on the charm which has fled, while the eye is fascinated with the expectation of what is to follow. A fascination, somewhat analogous to this, is experienced when we look at the undulations of a flag streaming to the wind; at the wreathings and convolutions of a column of smoke; or at the momentary beauties and splendors of fireworks, amid the darkness of night. In the human figure, however, the enchanting power of graceful motion is probably owing chiefly to the living expression which it exhibits—an expression ever renewed and ever varied—of taste and of mental elegance.

From the combination of these three elements (of colors, of forms, and of motion), what a variety of complicated results may be conceived! And in any one of these results, who can ascertain the respective share of each element in its production? Is it wonderful, then, that the word Beauty, supposing it at first to have been applied to colors alone, should gradually and insensibly acquire a more extensive meaning?

In this enlargement, too, of the signification of the word, it is particularly worthy of

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remark, that it is not in consequence of the discovery of any quality belonging in common to colors, to forms, and to motion, considered abstractly, that the same word is now applied to them indiscriminately. They all indeed agree in this, that they give pleasure to the spectator; but there can not, I think, be a doubt, that they please on principles essentially different; and that the transference of the word Beauty, from the first to the last, arises solely from their undistinguishable co-operation in producing the same agreeable effect, in consequence of their being all perceived by the same organ, and at the same instant.

DUGALD STEWART

**AIM AT CLEARNESS**

It is sufficiently evident, tho the maxim is often practically disregarded, that the first requisite of style, not only in rhetorical but in all compositions, is perspicuity; since, as Aristotle observes, language which is not intelligible, or not clearly and readily intelligible, fails, in the same proportion, of the purpose for which language is employed. And it is equally self-evident, tho this truth is still more frequently overlooked, that perspicuity is a relative quality, and consequently can not properly be predicated of any work, with-

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out a tacit reference to the class of readers or hearers for whom it is designed. Nor is it enough that the style be such as they are capable of understanding, if they bestow their utmost attention; the degree and the kind of attention, which they have been accustomed, or are likely to bestow, will be among the circumstances that are to be taken into the account, and provided for. I say the kind, as well as the degree, of attention, because some hearers and readers will be found slow of apprehension indeed, but capable of taking in what is very copiously and gradually explained to them; while others, on the contrary, who are much quicker at catching the sense of what is exprest in a short compass, are incapable of long attention, and are not only wearied, but absolutely bewildered, by a diffuse style.

**WHATELY**

### **USE ONLY WORDS THAT ARE UNDERSTOOD**

I have been curious enough to take a list of several hundred words in a sermon of a new beginner, which not one of his hearers among a hundred could possibly understand; neither can I easily call to mind any clergyman of my own acquaintance who is wholly exempt from this error, altho many of them



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agree with me in the dislike of the thing. But I am apt to put myself in the place of the vulgar, and think many words difficult or obscure, which they will not allow to be so because those words are obvious to scholars. I believe the method observed by the famous Lord Falkland in some of his writings would not be an ill one for young divines. I was assured by an old person of quality who knew him well, that when he doubted whether a word was perfectly intelligible or no he used to consult one of his lady's chambermaids (not the waiting-woman, because it was possible she might be conversant in romances); and by her judgment was guided whether to receive or reject it.

JONATHAN SWIFT

**TWO KINDS OF TIMIDITY**

Let us banish from our critical superstitions the notion that chastity of composition, or simplicity of style, is in any respect allied to timidity. There are two kinds of timidity, or rather it has two different origins, both of which cripple the free movement of thought. The one is the timidity of fastidiousness, the other of placid stupidity: the one shrinks from originality lest it should be regarded as impertinent; the other lest, being new, it should be wrong. We detect the one



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in the sensitive discreetness of the style. We detect the other in the complacency of its platitudes and the stereotyped commonness of its metaphors. The writer who is afraid of originality feels himself in deep water when he launches into a commonplace. For him who is timid because weak, there is no advice, except suggesting the propriety of silence. For him who is timid because fastidious, there is this advice: get rid of the superstition about chastity, and recognize the truth that a style may be simple, even if it move amid abstractions, or employ few Saxon words, or abound in concrete images and novel turns of expression.

GEORGE HENRY LEWES

## NEWSPAPER ENGLISH

William Cullen Bryant, who was a careful student of English, sought, while editor of the New York *Evening Post*, to prevent the writers for that paper from using over and above (for "more than"); artiste (for "artist"); aspirant; authoress; beat (for "defeat"); bagging (for "capturing"); balance (for "remainder"); banquet (for "dinner" or "supper"); bogus; casket (for "coffin"); claimed (for "asserted"); collided; commence (for "begin"); compete; cortége (for "procession"); cotemporary

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(for "contemporary"); couple (for "two"); darky (for "negro"); day before yesterday (for "the day before yesterday"); début; decrease (as a verb); democracy (applied to a political party); develop (for "expose"); devouring element (for "fire"); donate; employé; enacted (for "acted"); indorse (for "approve"); en route; esq.; graduate (for "is graduated"); gents (for "gentlemen"); "Hon."; House (for "House of Representatives"); humbug; inaugurate (for "begin"); in our midst; item (for "particle, extract, or paragraph"); is being done, and all the passives of this form; jeopardize; jubilant (for "rejoicing"); juvenile (for "boy"); lady (for "wife"); last (for "latest"); lengthy (for "long"); leniency (for "lenity"); loafer; loan or loaned (for "lend" or "lent"); located; majority (relating to places or circumstances, for "most"); Mrs. President, Mrs. Governor, Mrs. General, and all similar titles; mutual (for "common"); official (for "officer"); ovation; on yesterday; over his signature; pants (for "pantaloons"); parties (for "persons"); partially (for "partly"); past two weeks (for "last two weeks" and all similar expressions relating to a definite time); poetess; portion (for "part"); posted (for "informed"); progress (for "advance"); reliable (for "trustworthy"); rendition (for "performance"); repudiate (for "reject" or "dis-

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own"); retire (as an active verb); Rev. (for "the Rev."); role (for "part"); roughs; rowdies; secesh; sensation (for "noteworthy event"); standpoint (for "point of view"); start, in the sense of setting out; state (for "say"); taboo; talent (for "talents" or "ability"); talented; tapis; the deceased; war (for "dispute" or "disagreement").

### HOW FAR YOU SHOULD CONDENSE

It is of course impossible to lay down precise rules as to the degree of conciseness which is, on each occasion that may arise, allowable and desirable; but to an author who is, in his expression of any sentiment, wavering between the demands of perspicuity and of energy, and doubting whether the phrase which has the most of forcible brevity will be readily taken in, it may be recommended to use both expressions; first to expand the sense, sufficiently to be clearly understood, and then to contract it into the most compendious and striking form. This expedient might seem at first sight the most decidedly adverse to the brevity recommended; but it will be found in practise, that the addition of a compressed and pithy expression of the sentiment, which has been already stated at greater length, will produce the effect of brevity. For it is to be remembered that it



is not on account of the actual number of words that diffuseness is to be condemned, but to avoid the flatness and tediousness resulting from it; so that if this appearance can be obviated by the insertion of such an abridged repetition as is here recommended, which adds poignancy and spirit to the whole, conciseness will be, practically, promoted by the addition.

W~~HATELY~~

### **ORIGINALITY IS SINCERITY**

As Emerson says: "Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impressions with good-humored inflexibility, then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense, precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our opinion from another." Accepting the opinions of another and the tastes of another is very different from agreement in opinion and taste. Originality is independence, not rebellion; it is sincerity, not antagonism. Whatever you believe to be true and false, that proclaim to be true and false; whatever you think admirable and beautiful, that should be your model, even if all your friends and all



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the critics storm at you as a crotchet-monger and an eccentric. Whether the public will feel its truth and beauty at once, or after long years, or never cease to regard it as paradox and ugliness, no man can foresee; enough for you to know that you have done your best, have been true to yourself, and that the utmost inherent in your work has been displayed.

GEORGE HENRY LEWES

## **AVOID OBSCURITY**

An obscure and vague manner of expression is always and everywhere a very bad sign. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it comes from vagueness of thought; and this again almost always means that there is something radically wrong and incongruous about the thought itself—in a word, that it is incorrect. When a right thought springs up in the mind, it strives after expression and is not long in reaching it; for clear thought easily finds words to fit it. If a man is capable of thinking anything at all, he is also always able to express it in clear, intelligible, and unambiguous terms. Those writers who construct difficult, obscure, involved, and equivocal sentences, most certainly do not know aright what it is that they want to say: they have only a dull consciousness of it,

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which is still in the stage of struggle to shape itself as thought. Often, indeed, their desire is to conceal from themselves and others that they really have nothing at all to say. They wish to appear to know what they do not know, to think what they do not think, to say what they do not say. If a man has some real communication to make, which will he choose: an indistinct or a clear way of expressing himself? Even Quintilian remarks that things which are said by a highly educated man are often easier to understand and much clearer; and that the less educated a man is, the more obscurely he will write.

SCHOENHAUER

**CLEARNESS OF THOUGHT ESSENTIAL**

Universally, indeed, an unpractised writer is liable to be misled by his own knowledge of his own meaning, into supposing those expressions clearly intelligible, which are so to himself; but which may not be so to the reader, whose thoughts are not in the same train. And hence it is that some do not write or speak with so much perspicuity on a subject which has long been very familiar to them, as on one which they understand indeed, but with which they are less intimately acquainted, and in which their knowledge has been more recently acquired. In the former

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case it is a matter of some difficulty to keep in mind the necessity of carefully and copiously explaining principles which by long habit have come to assume in our minds the appearance of self-evident truths. Utterly incorrect therefore is Blair's notion that obscurity of style necessarily springs from indistinctness of conception. A little conversation on nautical affairs, with sailors, or on agriculture, with farmers, would soon have undeceived him.

WHATELY

### HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

The first rule, then, for a good style is that *the author should have something to say*; nay, this is in itself almost all that is necessary. Ah, how much it means! The neglect of this rule is a fundamental trait in the philosophical writing, and, in fact, in all the reflective literature of my country, more especially since Fichte. These writers all let it be seen that they want to appear as tho they had something to say; whereas they have nothing to say. Writing of this kind was brought in by the pseudo-philosophers at the universities, and now it is current everywhere, even among the first literary notabilities of the age. It is the mother of that strained and vague style, where there seem to be two



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or even more meanings in the sentence; also of that prolix and cumbrous manner of expression, called *le stile empesé*; again, of that mere waste of words which consists in pouring them out like a flood; finally, of that trick of concealing the direct poverty of thought under a farrago of never-ending chatter, which clacks away like a windmill and quite stupefies one—stuff which a man may read for hours together without getting hold of a single clearly exprest and definite idea. However, people are easy-going, and they have formed the habit of reading page upon page of all sorts of such verbiage, without having any particular idea of what the author really means. They fancy it is all as it should be, and fail to discover that he is writing simply for writing's sake.

SCHOPENHAUER

### **BE CLEAR AT ALL COSTS**

It is no easy matter, when people are advancing in anything, to prevent their going too fast for want of patience. This happens in nothing more frequently than in the prosecution of studies. Hence it is, that we meet crowds who attempt to be eloquent before they can speak. They affect the flow-ers of rhetoric before they understand the parts of speech. In the ordinary conversa-

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tion of this town, there are so many who can, as they call it, talk well, that there is not one in twenty that talks to be understood. This proceeds from an ambition to excel, or, as the term is, to shine in company. The matter is not to make themselves understood, but admired. They come together with a certain emulation, rather than benevolence. When you fall among such companions, the safe way is to give yourself up, and let the orators declaim for your esteem, and trouble yourself no further. It is said that a poet must be born so; but I think it may be much better said of an orator, especially when we talk of our town poets and orators: but the town poets are full of rules and laws; the town orators go through thick and thin, and are, forsooth, persons of such eminent natural parts, and knowledge of the world, that they despise all men as unexperienced scholastics, who wait for an occasion before they speak, or who speak no more than is necessary.

STEELE

### THE VALUE OF BREVITY

The proper arrangement of words into sentences and paragraphs gives clearness and strength. To attain a clear and pithy style, it may be necessary to cut down, to rearrange, and to rewrite whole passages of an essay.

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Gibbon wrote his "Memoirs" six times, and the first chapter of his "History" three times. Beginners are always slow to prune or cast away any thought or expression which may have cost labor. They forget that brevity is no sign of thoughtlessness. Much consideration is needed to compress the details of any subject into small compass. Essences are more difficult to prepare, and therefore more valuable, than weak solutions. Pliny wrote to one of his friends, "I have not time to write you a short letter, therefore I have written you a long one." Apparent elaborateness is always distasteful and weak. Vividness and strength are the product of an easy command of those small trenchant Saxon monosyllables which abound in the English language.

ANONYMOUS

**YOU SHOULD WRITE MUCH**

You should begin by learning to write, in order to give yourself a right account of your own thoughts, before you venture yourself to speak. They who have not learned this first, speak in general badly and with difficulty; unless, indeed, they have that fatal facility, a thousand times worse than hesitation or than silence, which drowns thought in floods of words, or in a torrent of copiousness, sweeping away good earth, and leaving be-



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hind sand and stones alone. Heaven keep us from those interminable talkers, such as are often to be found in southern countries, who deluge you, relatively to anything and to nothing, with a shower of dissertation and a downpouring of their eloquence! During nine-tenths of the time there is not one rational thought in the whole of this twaddle, carrying along in its course every kind of rubbish and platitude. The class of persons who produce a speech so easily, and who are ready at the shortest moment to extemporize a speech, a dissertation, or a homily, know not how to compose a tolerable sentence; and I repeat that, with such exceptions as defy all rule, he who has not learned how to write will never know how to speak.

M. BAUTAIN

### **THE POWER OF BOOKS**

At no hour of your life will the love of letters ever oppress you as a burden, or fail you as resource. In the vain and foolish exultation of the heart, which the brighter prospects of life will sometimes excite, the pensive portress of science shall call you to the sober pleasures of her holy cell. In the mortifications of disappointment, her soothing voice shall whisper serenity and peace. In social converse with the mighty dead of

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ancient days, you will never smart under the galling sensation of dependence upon the mighty living of the present age; and in your struggles with the world, should a crisis ever occur, when even friendship may deem it prudent to desert you; when even your country may seem ready to abandon herself and you; when, even priest and Levite shall come and look on you, and pass by on the other side; seek refuge, my unfailing friends, and be assured you will find it, in the friendships of Lælius and Scipio; in the patriotism of Cicero, Demosthenes, and Burke; as well as in the precepts and example of Him, whose law is love, and who taught us to remember injuries only to forgive them.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

### **SIMPLICITY AND GREATNESS**

There are occasions when the simplest and fewest words surpass in effect all the wealth of rhetorical amplification. An example may be seen in the passage which has been a favorite illustration from the days of Longinus to our own. "God said: Let there be light! and there was light." This is a conception of power so calm and simple that it needs only to be presented in the fewest and the plainest words, and would be confused or weakened by any suggestion of accessories.

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Let us amplify the expressions in the redundant style of miscalled eloquent writers: "God, in the magnificent fulness of creative energy, exclaimed: Let there be light! and lo! the agitating fiat immediately went forth, and thus in one indivisible moment the whole universe was illumined." We have here a sentence which I am certain many a writer would, in secret, prefer to the masterly plainness of Genesis. It is not a sentence which would have captivated critics.

GEORGE HENRY LEWES

### **DIFFUSENESS PRODUCES WEAKNESS**

It is obvious, and has often been remarked, that extreme conciseness is ill-suited to hearers or readers whose intellectual powers and cultivation are but small. The usual expedient, however, of employing a prolix style by way of accommodation to such minds, is seldom successful. Most of those who could have comprehended the meaning, if more briefly exprest, and many of those who could not do so, are likely to be bewildered by tedious expansion; and being unable to maintain a steady attention to what is said, they forget part of what they have heard, before the whole is completed. Add to which, that the feebleness produced by excessive dilution (if such an expression may be allowed), will



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occasion the attention to languish; and what is imperfectly attended to, however clear in itself, will usually be but imperfectly understood. Let not an author, therefore, satisfy himself by finding that he has exprest his meaning so that, if attended to, he can not fail to be understood; he must consider also what marked attention is likely to be paid to it. If on the one hand much matter is exprest in very few words to an unreflecting audience, or if, on the other hand, there is a wearisome prolixity, the requisite attention may very probably not be bestowed.

W<sup>H</sup>ATELY

**JOHNSON'S STYLE**

As a writer, he is the very incarnation of good sense; and as a man, he was an example of so high a degree of virtue, magnanimity, and self-sacrifice that he has been justly placed by a profound modern speculator among the heroes of his country's annals. . . . Johnson's style during the whole of his career was exceedingly peculiar and characteristic both in its beauties and defects, and when he arrived at eminence may be said to have produced a revolution in the manner of writing in English; and as this revolution has to a certain degree lasted till the present day, it will be well to say a few words on the subject.

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It is in the highest degree pompous, sonorous, and, to use a happy expression of Coleridge, hyper-latinistic; running into perpetual antithesis, and balancing period against period with an almost rhythmical regularity, which at once fills and fatigues the ear. . . . The prevailing defect of Johnson's style is uniformity: the combinations of his kaleidoscope are soon exhausted; his peal of bells is very limited in its changes; and there is necessarily, in so artificial a style, an air of pretention and ambitiousness, the sameness is more fatiguing than would be the snipped periods and tuneless meanness of a more unostentatious mode of expression. . . . His mind, admirably adapted as it was for the scientific part of criticism, was impotent to feel or appreciate what is picturesque or passionate. He is like a deaf man seated at a symphony of Beethoven—a sense is wanting to him.

THOMAS B. SHAW

## **ECONOMY OF ATTENTION**

To so present ideas that they may be apprehended with the least possible mental effort, is the desideratum toward which most rhetorical rules point. When we condemn writing that is wordy, or confused, or intricate—when we praise this style as easy,

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and blame that as fatiguing, we consciously or unconsciously assume this desideratum as our standard of judgment. Regarding language as an apparatus of symbols for the conveyance of thought, we may say that, as in a mechanical apparatus, the more simple and the better arranged its parts, the greater will be the effect produced. In either case, whatever force is absorbed by the machine is deducted from the result. A reader or listener has at each moment but a limited amount of mental power available. To recognize and interpret the symbols presented to him, requires part of this power; to arrange and combine the images suggested requires a further part; and only that part which remains can be used for realizing the thought conveyed. Hence, the more time and attention it takes to receive and understand each sentence, the less time and attention can be given to the contained idea; and the less vividly will that idea be conceived.

HERBERT SPENCER

**THE IMPORTANCE OF LUCIDITY**

Obviously, if a reader is engaged in extricating the meaning from a sentence which ought to have reflected its meaning as in a mirror, the mental energy thus employed is abstracted from the amount of force which



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he has to bestow on the subject; he has mentally to form anew the sentence which has been clumsily formed by the writer; he wastes, on interpretation of the symbols, force which might have been concentrated on meditation of the propositions. This waste is inappreciable in writing of ordinary excellence, and on subjects not severely tasking to the attention; but if inappreciable, it is always waste; and in bad writing, especially on topics of philosophy and science, the waste is important. And it is this which greatly narrows the circle for serious works. Interest in the subjects treated of may not be wanting; but the abundant energy is wanting which to the fatigue of consecutive thinking will add the labor of deciphering the language. Many of us are but too familiar with the fatigue of reconstructing unwieldy sentences in which the clauses are not logically dependent, nor the terms free from equivocation; we know what it is to have to hunt for the meaning hidden in a maze of words; and we can understand the yawning indifference which must soon settle upon every reader of such writing, unless he has some strong external impulse or abundant energy.

GEORGE HENRY LEWES

**AVOID POMPOUS VERBOSITY**

It is needful to insist the more on the energetic effect of conciseness, because so many, especially young writers and speakers, are apt to fall in a style of pompous verbosity, not from negligence, but from an idea that they are adding both perspicuity and force to what is said, when they are only encumbering the sense with a needless load of words. And they are the more likely to commit this mistake because such a style will often appear not only to the author, but to the vulgar (*i.e.*, the vulgar in intellect), among his hearers, to be very majestic and impressive. It is not uncommon to hear a speaker or writer of this class mentioned as having a "very fine command of language," when, perhaps, it might be said with more correctness, that "his language has a command of him"; *i.e.*, that he follows a train of words rather than of thought, and strings together all the striking expressions that occur to him on the subject, instead of first forming a clear notion of the sense he wishes to convey, and then seeking for the most appropriate vehicle in which to convey it. He has but the same "command of language" that the rider has of a horse which runs away with him.

W HATELY

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### **THE BEAUTY OF PLAIN SPEECH**

A perfectly healthy sentence, it is true, is extremely rare. For the most part we miss the hue and fragrance of the thought; as if we could be satisfied with the dews of the morning or evening without their colors, or the heavens without their azure. The most attractive sentences are, perhaps, not the wisest, but the surest and roundest. They are spoken firmly and conclusively, as if the speaker had a right to know what he says, and if not wise, they have at least been well learned. Sir Walter Raleigh might well be studied, if only for the excellence of his style, for he is remarkable in the midst of so many masters. There is a natural emphasis in his style, like a man's tread, and a breathing space between the sentences, which the best of modern writing does not furnish. His chapters are like English parks, or say rather like a Western forest, where the larger growth keeps down the underwood, and one may ride on horseback through the openings. All the distinguished writers of that period possess a greater vigor and naturalness than the more modern, for it is allowed to slander our own time; and when we read a quotation from one of them in the midst of a modern author, we seem to have come suddenly upon a greener ground, a greater depth and strength of soil.



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It is as if a green bough were laid across the page, and we are refreshed as by the sight of fresh grass in midwinter or early spring. You have constantly the warrant of life and experience in what you read. The little that is said is eked out by implication of the much that was done. The sentences are verdurous and blooming as evergreen and flowers, because they are rooted in fact and experience, but our false and florid sentences have only the tints of flowers without their sap or roots. All men are really most attracted by the beauty of plain speech, and they even write in a florid style in imitation of this. They prefer to be misunderstood rather than come short of its exuberance.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

### **POINTS ABOUT WORDS**

It seems often as if an almost unaccountable caprice presided over the fortunes of words, and determined which should live and which die. Thus in a vast number of instances a word lives on as a verb, but has ceased to be employed as a noun; we say "to embarrass," but no longer an "embarrass"; "to revile," but not, with Chapman and Milton, a "revile"; "to wed," but not "a wed," unless it should be urged that this survives in "wed-lock," a locking or binding together through the giving and re-

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ceiving of a "wed" or pledge, namely the ring; we say "to infest," but use no longer the adjective "infest." Or with a reversed fortune a word lives on as a noun, but has perished as a verb—thus as a noun substantive, a "slug," but no longer "to slug" or slothful; a "child," but no longer "to child" ("childing autumn," Shakespeare); or as a noun adjective, "serene," but not "to serene," a beautiful word, which we have let go, as the French have "sereiner"; "meek," but not "to meek" (Wiclif); "fond," but not with Dryden, "to fond."

Or again, the affirmative remains, but the negative is gone; thus "wisdom," but not any more "unwisdom" (Wiclif); "cunning," but not "uncunning"; "manhood," "wit," "mighty," but not "unmanhood," "unwit," "unmighty" (all in Chaucer); "buxom," but not "unbuxom" (Dryden); "science," but not "nescience" (Glanvill); "to know," but not "to unknow" (Wiclif), which last survives only in "unknowing" and "unknown." Or once more, with a curious variation from this, the negative survives, while the affirmative is gone; thus "wieldy" (Chaucer) survives only in "unwieldy"; "couth" and "couthly" (both in Spenser), only in "uncouth" and "uncouthly"; "ruly" (Foxe) only in "unruly"; "gainly" (Henry More) in "ungainly"; these last two were both of them serviceable words, and have been ill

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lost; "exorable" (Holland) and "evitable" only in "inexorable" and "inevitable." In like manner "semble" (Foxye) and "hearten" (Chapman) have disappeared; while "dissemble" and "dishearten" continue. So also of other pairs one has been taken and one left; "height," or "hight," as Milton better spelled it, remains, but "lowth" (Bacon) is gone; "righteousness," or "rightwiseness," as it would once and more accurately have been written, for "righteous" is a corruption of "rightwise," remains, but its correspondent "wrongwiseness" has been taken. Again, of whole groups of words formed on some particular scheme it may be only a single specimen will survive. Thus "gainsay," that is, again say, survives; but "gainstrive" (Foxye), that is, resist, "gainstand," and other similarly formed words, exist no longer. It is the same with "foolhardy," which is but one, tho now indeed the only one remaining, of at least four adjectives formed on the same principle; thus "foollarge," quite as expressive a word as prodigal, occurs in Chaucer, and "foolhasty," found also in him, lived on to the time of Holland; while "foolhappy" is in Spenser. "Exhort" remains; but "dehort," a word whose place neither dissuade nor any other exactly supplies, has escaped us. We have "twilight," but "twibill" (=bipennis, Chapman) is extinct.

TRENCH



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### **CAUSES OF MONOTONY**

How is variety to be secured? The plan is simple, but like many other simple plans, is not without difficulty. It is for the writer to obey the great cardinal principle of sincerity, and be brave enough to express himself in his own way, following the moods of his own mind, rather than endeavoring to catch the accents of another, or to adapt himself to some standard of taste. No man really thinks and feels monotonously. If he is monotonous in his manner of setting forth his thoughts and feelings, that is either because he has not learned the art of writing, or because he is more or less consciously imitating the manner of others. The subtle play of thought will give movement and life to his style if he do not clog it with critical superstitions. I do not say that it will give him grace and power; I do not say that relying on perfect sincerity will make him a fine writer, because sincerity will not give talent; but I say that sincerity will give him all the power that is possible to him, and will secure him the inestimable excellence of variety.

**GEORGE HENRY LEWES**

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### **GOOD TASTE IS NECESSARY**

By no amount of study can a man who is destitute of good taste acquire that delicate quality of mind which is as essential to gracefulness of expression in language, as are a musical ear and soul, to the true utterance of the musician and of the poet.

G. WASHINGTON MOON

### **STUDY BIOGRAPHY DILIGENTLY**

The study of biography, if properly prosecuted, should increase our faith in God's providence. When we see how degraded, how selfish, how sensual, nay, how devilish, many of our fellow creatures are, our faith in God's providence is apt to be shaken. We are inclined to feel that human nature is a wretched thing, only a few degrees above the bestial; we almost despair of the progress and amelioration of the race; and we begin to think that this world may be a God-forsaken planet. Now one remedy for this despair is the contemplation of the great men whose memory lives in biography. These men are likenesses to God. They are, indeed, set in frames of clay, and often blurred and even shattered by the accidents and storms of time, yet still they retain the lineaments of the Great Original,

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His truthfulness, sympathy, and long-suffering goodness. And hence it happens that the contemplation of such men as Socrates, St. Paul, John Howard, David Livingstone, makes us feel that this world is not God-forsaken after all. Such men as these stand in the same relation to God as the planets do to the sun. They came originally from Him; from Him they draw their luster; and in the dark night of time, while He remains unseen, they reflect His light and shed down comfort and guidance upon the dim and dangerous paths of groping humanity.

DAVID PRYDE

### CARLYLE'S STYLE

Not one obscure line, or half-line did he ever write. His meaning lies plain as the daylight, and he who runs may read; indeed, only he who runs can read, and keep up with the meaning. It has the distinctness of a picture to his mind, and he tells us only what he sees printed in largest English type upon the face of things. He utters substantial English thoughts in plainest English dialects; for it must be confest, he speaks more than one of these. . . . His felicity and power of expression surpass even his special merit as historian and critic. Therein his experience has not failed him, but furnished him



with such a store of winged, ay, and legged words, as only a London life, perchance, could give account of. We had not understood the wealth of the language before. Nature is ransacked, and all the resorts and purlieus of humanity are taxed, to furnish the fittest symbol for his thought. He does not go to the dictionary, the word-book, but to the word-manufactory itself, and has made endless work for the lexicographers.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

### FAVORITE BOOKS OF GREAT WRITERS

Milton's favorite books were Homer, Ovid, and Euripides. The latter book was also the favorite of Charles James Fox, who regarded the study of it as especially useful to a public speaker. On the other hand, Pitt took especial delight in Milton—whom Fox did not appreciate—taking pleasure in reciting, from "Paradise Lost," the grand speech of Belial before the assembled powers of Pandemonium. Another favorite book of Pitt's was Newton's "Principia." Again, the Earl of Chatham's favorite book was "Barrow's Sermons," which he read so often as to be able to repeat them from memory; while Burke's companions were Demosthenes, Milton, Bolingbroke, and Young's "Night Thoughts." Curran's favorite was Homer,

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which he read through once a year. Vergil was another of his favorites—his biographer, Phillips, saying that he once saw him reading the “Æneid” in the cabin of a Holyhead packet while every one about him was prostrate by sea-sickness. Of the poets, Dante’s favorite was Vergil; Corneille’s was Lucan; Schiller’s was Shakespeare; Gray’s was Spenser; while Coleridge admired Collins and Bowles. Dante himself was a favorite with most great poets, from Chaucer to Byron and Tennyson. Lord Brougham, Macaulay, and Carlyle have alike admired and eulogized the great Italian. The former advised the students at Glasgow that, next to Demosthenes, the study of Dante was the best preparative for the eloquence of the pulpit or the bar. Robert Hall sought relief in Dante from the racking pains of spinal disease; and Sidney Smith took to the same poet for comfort and solace in his old age. It was characteristic of Goethe that his favorite book should have been Spinoza’s “Ethics,” in which he said he had found a peace and consolation such as he had been able to find in no other work.

SAMUEL SMILES

**HAVE A PLAN**

Few write in the way in which an architect builds; who, before he sets to work, sketches out his plan, and thinks it over down to its smallest details. Nay, most people write only as tho they were playing dominoes; and as in this game the pieces are arranged half by design, half by chance, so it is with the sequence and connection of their sentences. They only just have an idea of what the general shape of their work will be, and of the aim they set before themselves. Many are ignorant even of this, and write as the coral-insects build; period joins to period, and Lord knows what the author means.

SCHOPENHAUER

**READ ALOUD**

He who wants to know whether he has written what he wishes to say, and as he ought to say it, let him read it aloud to himself. Even his own voice will seem as apart from him as that of an auditor. Or let him do as the shrewd Molière did, read his composition to his cook, if no one else is at hand—read it to any one who will listen—and the reader will at once become sensible of redundancies, omissions, irrelevancies, and in-



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congruities, of which his own wit will never make him sensible. Even stupidity as an auditor will improve style.

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

### THE FORMING OF STYLE

In the first place, give careful and earnest thought to the subject about which you propose to write. Tho at first sight this may seem to have little to do with the formation of style, the relation between the two is in reality extremely close. Before we have ourselves obtained a full, clear, and decided view of the subject, we can not hope to communicate such an impression of it to others. The habit of writing without first having distinct ideas of what we intend to say, will inevitably produce a loose, confused, and slovenly style.

Secondly, compose frequently. Rules are of service, but they are not intended to take the place of practise. Nothing but exercise will give facility of composition.

In the third place, compose slowly and with care. It is to hasty and careless writing that a bad style may generally be traced. Faults are thus contracted which it will cost infinite trouble to unlearn.

Quintilian alludes to this point in the following terms: "I enjoin that such as are

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beginning the practise of composition write slowly and with anxious deliberation. Their great object, at first, should be to write as well as possible; practise will enable them to write quickly. By degrees, matter will offer itself still more readily; words will be at hand; composition will flow; everything, as in the arrangement of a well-ordered family, will present itself in its proper place. The sum of the whole is this: by hasty composition we shall never acquire the art of composing well; by writing well, we shall soon be able to write speedily."

Fourthly, revise carefully. Nothing is more necessary to what is written, or more important to the writer. Even the most experienced writers are apt to commit oversights, for which revision is the only remedy. If we put aside what has been written till the expressions we have used are forgotten, and then review our work with a cool and critical eye, as if it were the performance of another, we shall discern many imperfections which at first were overlooked. This is the time for pruning away redundancies; for seeing that the parts of sentences are correctly arranged and connected by the proper particles; for observing whether the requirements of grammar are strictly complied with; and for bringing style into a consistent and effective form. Disagreeable as this labor of correction may be, all must submit to it who would attain

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literary distinction, or even express their thoughts with ordinary propriety and force. A little practise will soon create a critical taste, and render the work, if not pleasant, at least easy and tolerable.

In the fifth place, study the style of the best authors. Notice their peculiarities; observe what gives effect to their writings; compare one with another; and, in composing, endeavor to avoid their faults and imitate their beauties.

No servile imitation is here recommended. This is in the highest degree dangerous, generally resulting in stiffness and artificiality of manner, and a lack of self-confidence, which is fatal to success in composition. Avoid adopting a favorite author's peculiar phrases or constructions. "It is infinitely better," says Blair, "to have something that is our own, tho of moderate beauty, than to affect to shine in borrowed ornaments, which will, at last, betray the utter poverty of our genius." Modifying our style by assimilating it to one which we particularly admire, or which the world has stamped with its approval, is quite a different thing from laying aside our own individuality entirely, to adopt another's, which we have but a slight chance of being able to maintain.

No exercise is likely to aid us more in acquiring a good style than to translate frequently from the writings of some eminent



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English author into our own words; to take, for instance, a page of Addison or Goldsmith, and, having read it over until we have fully mastered the meaning, to lay aside the book and attempt to reproduce the passage from memory. A comparison of what we have written with the original will then show us in what the faults of our style consist, and how we may correct them; and, among the different modes of expressing the same thought, will enable us to perceive which is the most beautiful.

G. P. QUACKENBOS

**GET POSSESSION OF YOUR SUBJECT**

To write well, then, an author must be in full possession of his subject; he must reflect on it enough to see clearly the order of his thoughts, and to put them in proper sequence—in a continuous chain, each of whose links represents a unified idea; and when he has taken up his pen, he must direct it successively from one main point to the next, not letting it stray therefrom, nor yet allowing it to dwell immoderately on any, nor, in fact, giving it other movement than that determined by the space to be traversed. Herein consists the rigor of style; and herein lies that which gives it unity and regulates its speed. It is this, too, and this alone, which

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suffices to render a style precise and simple, even and clear, lively and coherent. If to obedience to this principle—a principle dictated by genius—an author joins delicacy and taste, caution in the choice of phraseology, care in the matter of expressing things only in the most general terms, his style will have positive nobility. If he has, further, a certain distrust of his first impulses, a contempt for what is superficially brilliant, and a steady aversion for what is equivocal and trifling, his style will be not simply grave, but even majestic. In fine, if he writes as he thinks, if he is himself convinced of what he wishes to prove, this good faith with himself, which is the foundation of propriety toward others and of sincerity in style, will make him accomplish his whole purpose; provided always that his inner conviction is not exprest with too violent enthusiasm, and that he shows throughout more candor than confidence and more light than heat.

BUFFON

### STUDY WORDS

Here is the word "post"; how various are the senses in which it is employed; "post"-office; "post"-haste; a "post" standing in the ground; a military "post"; an official "post"; "to post" a ledger. Might one not at first presume it impossible to bring all

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these uses of "post" to a common center! Yet, indeed, when once on the right track, nothing is easier; "post" is the Latin "positus," that which is *placed*; the piece of timber is "placed" in the ground, and so a "post"; a military station is a "post," for a man is "placed" in it, and must not quit it without orders; to travel "post" is to have certain relays of horses "placed" at intervals, that so no delay on the road may occur; the "post"-office is that which avails itself of this mode of communication; to "post" a ledger is to "place" or register its several items.

**TRENCH**

## **APPEAR TO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY**

Universally, a writer or speaker should endeavor to maintain the appearance of expressing himself, not as if he wanted to say something, but as if he had something to say: *i.e.*, not as if he had a subject set him, and was anxious to compose the best essay or declamation on it that he could; but as if he had some ideas to which he was anxious to give utterance; not as if he wanted to compose (for instance) a sermon, and was desirous of performing that task satisfactorily; but as if there was something in his mind which he was desirous of communicating to his hearers.

**WHATELY**



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### WRITING AND THINKING

To write well, it is at once to think deeply, to feel vividly, and to express clearly; is to have at once intelligence, sensibility, and taste. Style supposes the united exercises of all the intellectual faculties. Ideas, and they alone, are its foundation. Well-sounding words are a mere accessory, dependent simply upon the possession of an external sense. One needs only to possess something of an ear for avoiding awkwardness in sound, and to have trained and bettered it by reading the poets and orators, and one is mechanically led to imitate poetical cadence and the turns of oratory. Now imitation never created anything; hence this euphony of words forms neither the basis nor the tone of style. It is, in fact, often found in writings devoid of ideas.

The tone, which is simply an agreement of the style with the nature of the subject, should never be forced, but should arise naturally from the very essence of the material, depending to a large extent upon the generalization one has in mind. If the author rises to the most inclusive ideas, and if his subject itself is lofty, his tone will apparently rise to the same height; and if while sustaining the tone at that altitude his genius proves copious enough to surround each particular object

with a brilliant light, if the author can unite beauty of color with vigor of design, if he can, in a word, represent each idea by a lively and well-defined image, and make of each sequence of ideas a picture that is harmonious and energetic, the tone will be not simply elevated but sublime.

**BUFFON**

### **CULTIVATE SYMPATHY**

The works which we should chiefly study are not those which contain the greatest fund of knowledge, but which raise us into sympathy with the intellectual energy of the author, and through which a great mind multiplies itself, as it were, in the reader.

**CHANNING**

### **STUDY THE DRAMA**

The purpose of the drama is to teach a complete knowledge of human character. What an all-important subject! To show its importance, let us imagine a man without this knowledge. What a sad failure he would be! Give him all other kinds of knowledge under the sun. Let him understand the stars, the various animals, the various plants, the minerals and strata of the earth. Let him have at his ready command all the tongues of men.

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Let him possess all the bearing and graces of an angel, and the golden thoughts and the musical words of the poet. Yet without this knowledge of human nature he would be the veriest fool; and all his other accomplishments would only hurry him the more readily into absurdity. He could not by any possibility conduct himself properly to those fellow creatures whom he did not know. He would be at once a laughing-stock and a nuisance. Next to the knowledge of God, indeed, the knowledge of human character is the most important. Without it there could be no virtue. It is one of the foundations on which virtue must stand. If we do not know our own character, we can not know our own failings; and if we do not know our failings, we can not correct them. If we do not know our neighbor's character, we can not know his virtues; and if we do not know his virtues, we can not act justly toward him. "Know thyself," was the maxim of the old Greek philosopher. "Know thyself, and all thy fellow creatures," is the truer and wider maxim of a higher philosophy.

DAVID PRYDE



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**THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM**

It is of the last importance that English criticism should clearly discern what rule for its course, in order to avail itself of the field now opening to it, and to produce fruit to the future, it ought to take. The rule may be summed up in one word, *disinterestedness*. And how is criticism to show disinterestedness? By keeping aloof from practise; by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches; by steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them, which perhaps ought often to be attached to them, which in this country at any rate are certain to be attached to them quite sufficiently, but which criticism has really nothing to do with. Its business is, as I have said, simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and, by its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas. Its business is to do this with inflexible honesty, with due ability; but its business is to do no more, and to leave alone all questions of practical consequences and applications, questions which will never fail to have due prominence given to them.

. . . It is because criticism has so little kept

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in the pure intellectual sphere, has so little detached itself from practise, has been so directly polemical and controversial, that it has so ill accomplished, in this country, its best spiritual work; which is to keep man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarizing, to lead him toward perfection, by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself, and the absolute beauty and fitness of things.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

### CONSTRUCT YOUR SENTENCES CAREFULLY

In respect to the construction of sentences, it is an obvious caution to abstain from such as are too long; but it is a mistake to suppose that the obscurity of many long sentences depends on their length alone. A well-constructed sentence of very considerable length may be more readily understood than a shorter one which is more awkwardly framed. If a sentence be so constructed that the meaning of each part can be taken in as we proceed, tho it be evident that the sense is not brought to a close, its length will be little or no impediment to perspicuity; but if the former part of the sentence convey no distinct meaning till we arrive nearly at the end, however plain it may then appear, it

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will be, on the whole, deficient in perspicuity; for it will need to be read over, or thought over, a second time, in order to be fully comprehended; which is what few readers or hearers are willing to be burdened with. Take as an instance such a sentence as this: "It is not without a degree of patient attention and persevering diligence, greater than the generality are willing to bestow, tho not greater than the object deserves, that the habit can be acquired of examining and judging of our own conduct with the same accuracy and impartiality as that of another"; this labors under the defect I am speaking of; which may be remedied by some such alteration as the following: "The habit of examining our own conduct as accurately as that of another, and judging it with the same impartiality, can not be acquired without a degree of patient attention and persevering diligence, not greater indeed than the object deserves, but greater than the generality are willing to bestow." The two sentences are nearly the same in length, and in the words employed; but the alteration of the arrangement allows the latter to be understood clause by clause, as it proceeds. The caution just given is the more necessary to be insisted on, because an author is apt to be misled by reading over a sentence to himself, and being satisfied on finding it perfectly intelligible; forgetting that he himself has the



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advantage, which a hearer has not, of knowing at the beginning of the sentence what is coming in the close.

**WHATELY**

## **CULTIVATE COURAGE AND PERSEVERANCE**

There needs to be all the force that enthusiasm can give to enable a man to succeed in any great enterprise of life. Without it, the obstruction and difficulty he has to encounter on every side might compel him to succumb; but with courage and perseverance, inspired by enthusiasm, a man feels strong enough to face any danger, to grapple with any difficulty. What an enthusiasm was that of Columbus, who, believing in the existence of a new world, braved the dangers of unknown seas; and when those about him despaired and rose up against him, threatening to cast him into the sea, still stood firm upon his hope and courage until the great new world at length rose upon the horizon! The brave man will not be baffled, but tries and tries again until he succeeds. The tree does not fall at the first stroke, but only by repeated strokes and after great labor. We may see the visible success at which a man has arrived, but forget the toil and suffering and peril through which it has been achieved. When a friend of

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Marshal Lefevre was complimenting him on his possessions and good fortune, the marshal said: "You envy me, do you? Well, you shall have these things at a better bargain than I had. Come into the court: I'll fire at you with a gun twenty times at thirty paces, and if I don't kill you, all shall be your own. What! you won't! Very well; recollect, then, that I have been shot at more than a thousand times, and much nearer, before I arrived at the state in which you now find me!"

SAMUEL SMILES

**READ GREAT AUTHORS**

If you were driven into a corner, and compelled to produce something as your own thoughts and opinions on an important point, at once, you would wish to stimulate your mind, and key it up to the highest point. How would you do it? You might reach it through the body, and, by stimulating that with wines or opium, might excite the mind. But then, the results thus produced would be uncertain. They might be correct, and they might be like the ravings of the mind by disease. But, at any rate, the body and mind would both suffer by this unnatural excitement. The reaction is awfully great; and, therefore, you may not do it. What can you do? I reply, that you can stimu-

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late your mind at any time, when the body is healthful, by reading. No one can read the speeches of Burke, of Chatham, and of our own Patrick Henry, without being moved. No matter what you are writing upon, or upon what you are to speak, you can not read a good book without being stimulated. The dream of Clarence, and the speeches of Hamlet, in Shakespeare; the speeches of men in the senate; the addresses of men from the pulpit; and, above all, the overwhelming torrent of clear thought, in burning language, which the masters of ancient times poured out—will swell the bosom, rouse the soul, and call all your own powers into action. This effect of books will last through life; and he who knows how to read to advantage, will ever have something as applicable to his mental powers, as electricity is to move the animal system. The man who has sat over the workings of a powerful mind, as exhibited on the written page, without being excited, moved, and made to feel that he can do something, and will do something, has yet to learn one of the highest pleasures of the student's life, and is yet ignorant of what rivers of delight are flowing around him through all the journey of life.

JOHN TODD



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**YOU SHOULD BE OPTIMISTIC**

A little youthful ardor is a great help in life, and is useful as an energetic motive-power. It is gradually cooled down by time, no matter how glowing it has been, while it is trained and subdued by experience. But it is a healthy and hopeful indication of character—to be encouraged in a right direction, and not to be sneered down and repressed. It is a sign of vigorous, unselfish nature, as egotism is of a narrow and selfish one; and to begin life with egotism and self-sufficiency is fatal to all breadth and vigor of character. Life, in such a case, would be like a year in which there was no spring. Without a generous seed-time, there will be an unflowering summer and an unproductive harvest. And youth is the spring-time of life, in which, if there be not a fair share of enthusiasm, little will be attempted, and still less done. It also considerably helps the working quality, inspiring confidence and hope, and carrying one through the dry details of business and duty with cheerfulness and joy.

**SAMUEL SMILES**

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### THINK ONE THING AT A TIME

Good writing should be governed by the rule that a man can think only one thing clearly at a time; and, therefore, that he should not be expected to think two or even more things in one and the same moment. But this is what is done when a writer breaks up his principal sentence into little pieces, for the purpose of pushing into the gaps thus made two or three other thoughts by way of parenthesis; thereby unnecessarily and wantonly confusing the reader.

SCHOPENHAUER

### CLEARNESS OF EXPRESSION DEPENDS UPON CLEAR IDEAS

All that is in the power of a student of style and who wishes to make a style for himself, are clearness, brevity, and the use of relevant and vivid similes. "Be clear," was the best thing Napoleon said to his secretaries. Clearness of statement can be acquired by any one who has clear ideas. Brevity is almost a mechanical attainment, since a man has only to stop when he has written as much as his adversary would read if sent to him—or would listen to if spoken to him. Meaning, as has been said, may be made

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clearer and even enlivened by comparison. Alma-Tadema says, "As the sun colors the flowers, so does art color life." Comparisons and similes are the sun of style and impart color to it.

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

### **AMERICAN AND BRITISH ENGLISH**

The most important peculiarity of American English is a laxity, irregularity, and confusion in the use of particles. The same thing is, indeed, observable in England, but not to the same extent, tho some gross departures from idiomatic propriety, such as different to for different from, are common in England, which none but very ignorant persons would be guilty of in America. . . . In the tenses of the verbs, I am inclined to think that well-educated Americans conform more closely to grammatical propriety than the corresponding class in England. . . . In general, I think we may say that, in point of naked syntactical accuracy, the English of America is not at all inferior to that of England; but we do not discriminate so precisely in the meaning of words, nor do we habitually, in either conversation or in writing, express ourselves so gracefully, or employ so classic a diction, as the English. Our taste in language is less fastidious, and our licenses and inaccuracies are more frequently of a



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character indicative of want of refinement and elegant culture than those we hear in educated society in England.

GEORGE P. MARSH

## **HOW TO BE GREAT**

Great writers should be our companions if we would learn to write greatly; but no familiarity with their manner will supply the place of native endowment. Writers are born, no less than poets, and like poets, they learn to make their native gifts effective. Practise, aiding their vigilant sensibility, teaches them, perhaps unconsciously, certain methods of effective presentation, how one arrangement of words carries with it more power than another, how familiar and concrete expressions are demanded in one place, and in another place abstract expressions unclogged with disturbing suggestions. Every author thus silently amasses a store of empirical rules, furnished by his own practise, and confirmed by the practise of others.

GEORGE HENRY LEWES

**ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS**

The great end of life, after all, is not to think, but to act; not to be learned, but to be good and noble. Accordingly, the crowning merit of a book must always be its practical usefulness. It may be a work of fiction, diverting your thoughts from the chaos of business, and allowing your mind to recover its elasticity and its tone; or a history, bringing before you high examples for your imitation; or a poem, elevating and refining your taste, and filling your imagination with beautiful forms; or the work of a Christian philosopher, rousing you, as with the blast of a trumpet, from self-indulgence to self-sacrifice. If it makes you more cheerful, or more amiable, or more sympathetic, or more appreciative of what is beautiful, or more resolute to follow what is good and noble, then the highest purpose of a book is gained.

DAVID PRYDE

**LIFE IS A SCHOOL**

The whole of life may be regarded as a great school of experience, in which men and women are the pupils. As in a school, many of the lessons learned there must needs be taken on trust. We may not understand them, and may possibly think it hard that we have

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to learn them, especially where the teachers are trials, sorrows, temptations, and difficulties; and yet we must not only accept their lessons, but recognize them as being divinely appointed. To what extent have the pupils profited by their experience in the school of life? What advantage have they taken of their opportunities for learning? What have they gained in discipline of heart and mind?—how much in growth of wisdom, courage, self-control? Have they preserved their integrity amid prosperity, and enjoyed life in temperance and moderation? or, has life been with them a mere feast of selfishness, without care or thought for others? What have they learned from trial and adversity? Have they learned patience, submission, and trust in God? or have they learned nothing but impatience, querulousness and discontent?

SAMUEL SMILES

### **ADDISON AS A MODEL**

As a describer of life and manners, Mr. Addison must be allowed to stand perhaps the first in the first rank. His humor is peculiar to himself; and is so happily diffused, as to give the grace of novelty to domestic scenes and daily occurrences. He never o'ersteps the modesty of nature, nor raises merriment or wonder by the violation of truth.



His figures neither divert by distortion, nor amaze by aggravation. He copies life with so much fidelity, that he can hardly be said to invent; yet his exhibitions have an air of so much original, that it is difficult to suppose them not merely the product of imagination.

As a teacher of wisdom he may be confidently followed. His religion has nothing in it enthusiastic or superstitious; he appears neither weakly credulous, nor wantonly skeptical; his morality is neither dangerously lax nor implacably rigid. All the enchantments of fancy, and all the cogency of arguments, are employed to recommend to the reader his real interest, the care of pleasing the author of his being. Truth is shown sometimes as the phantom of a vision, sometimes appears half veiled in an allegory, sometimes attracts regard in the robes of fancy, and sometimes steps forth in the confidence of reason. She wears a thousand dresses, and in all is pleasing.

His prose is the model of the middle style; on grave subjects, on formal, on light occasions not groveling; pure without scrupulosity, and exact without apparent elaboration; always equable, and always easy, without glowing words or pointed sentences. His page is always luminous, but never blazes in unexpected splendor. It seems to have been his principal endeavor to avoid all harshness and severity of diction; he is therefore some-

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times verbose in his transitions and connections, and sometimes descends too much to the language of conversation; yet, if his language had been less idiomatical, it might have lost somewhat of its genuine Anglicism. What he attempted he performed; he is never feeble, and he did not wish to be energetic; he is never rapid, and he never stagnates. His sentences have neither studied amplitude nor affected brevity; his periods, tho not diligently rounded, are voluble and easy. Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.

SAMUEL JOHNSON

## **WORDS DISCUST**

There was once a whole family of words, whereof the greater number are now under ban; which seem at one time to have been formed almost at pleasure, the only condition being that the combination should be a happy one—I mean all those singularly expressive words formed by a combination of verb and substantive, the former governing the latter; as “scarecrow,” “telltale,” “scapegrace,” “turncoat,” “turntail,” “skinflint,” “spend-thrift,” “spitfire,” “lickspittle,” “dare-devil” (=wagehals), “makebate” (=stören-

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fried), "marplot." These with a certain number of others, have held their ground, and may be said to be still more or less in use; but what a number more are forgotten; and yet, tho not always elegant, they constituted a very vigorous portion of our language, and preserved some of its most genuine idioms. It could not well be otherwise; they are almost all words of abuse, and the abusive words of a language are always among the most picturesque and vigorous and imaginative which it affords. The whole man speaks out in them, and often the man under the influence of passion and excitement, which always lend force and fire to his speech. Let me remind you of a few of them; "smellfeast," if not a better, is yet a more graphic, word than our foreign parasite; "clawback" is a stronger, if not a more graceful, word than flatterer or sycophant; "tossplot" (Fuller), or less frequently "reelpot" (Middleton), is a word which tells its own tale as well as drunkard; and "pinchpenny" (Holland), as well as or better than miser. And then what a multitude more there were in like kind; "spintext," "lack-latin," "mumblematins," all applied to ignorant clerics; "bitesheep" (a favorite word with Foxe), to such of these as were rather wolves tearing, than shepherds feeding, the flock; "slipstring" (=pendard, Beaumont and Fletcher), "slipgibbet," "scapegal-lows"; all names given to those who, how-



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ever they might have avoided, were justly owed to the gallows.

**TRENCH**

### **THE INFLUENCE OF BOOKS**

It is unnecessary to speak of the enormous moral influence which books have exercised upon the general civilization of mankind, from the Bible downward. They contain the treasured knowledge of the human race. They are the record of all labors, achievements, speculations, successes, and failures, in science, philosophy, religion, and morals. They have been the greatest motive-powers in all times. "From the Gospel to the Contrat Social," says De Bonald, "it is books that have made revolutions." Indeed, a great book is often a greater thing than a great battle. Even works of fiction have occasionally exercised immense power on society. Thus Rabelais in France, and Cervantes in Spain, overturned at the same time the dominion of monkery and chivalry, employing no other weapons but ridicule, the natural contrast of human terror. The people laughed, and felt reassured. So "Telema-chus" appeared, and recalled men back to the harmonies of nature.

**SAMUEL SMILES**

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**LEARN TO SEE THE ESSENTIAL POINT**

Find a man whose words paint you a likeness, you have found a man worth something; mark his manner of doing it, as very characteristic of him. In the first place, he could not have discerned the object at all, or seen the vital type of it, unless he had, what we may call, sympathized with it—had sympathy in him to bestow on objects. He must have been sincere about it, too; sincere and sympathetic; a man without worth can not give you the likeness of any object; he dwells in vague outwardness, fallacy, and trivial hearsay, about all objects. And, indeed, may we not say that intellect altogether expresses itself in this power of discerning what an object is? Whatsoever of faculty a man's mind may have will come out here. It is even of business a matter to be done. The gifted man is he who sees the essential point, and leaves all the rest aside as surplusage: it is his faculty, too, the man of business faculty, that he discern the true likeness, not the false superficial one, of the thing he has got to work in. And how much of morality is in the kind of insight we get of anything; "the eye seeing in all things what it brought with it the faculty of seeing!" To the mean eye all things are trivial, as certainly as to the jaundiced they are yellow. Raffael, the

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painters tell us, is the best of all portrait painters withal. No most gifted eye can exhaust the significance of any object. In the commonest human face there lies more than Raffael will take away with him.

CARLYLE

### MAJESTY IN PLAINNESS

A second property of the ability of speech, conferred by Christ upon his apostles, was its unaffected plainness and simplicity; it was to be easy, obvious and familiar; with nothing in it strained or far-fetched; no affected scheme, or airy fancies, above the reach or relish of an ordinary apprehension; no, nothing of all this; but their grand subject was truth, and consequently above all these petty arts, and poor additions; as not being capable of any greater luster or advantage, than to appear just as it is. For there is a certain majesty in plainness; as the proclamation of a prince never frisks it in tropes or fine conceits, in numerous and well-turned periods, but commands in sober, natural expressions. A substantial beauty, as it comes out of the hands of nature, needs neither paint nor patch; things never made to adorn, but to cover something that would be hid. It is with expression, and the clothing of a man's conception, as with the clothing of a



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man's body. All dress and ornament supposes imperfection, as designed only to supply the body with something from without, which it wanted, but had not its own. Gaudery is a pitiful and mean thing, not extending farther than the surface of the body; nor is the highest gallantry considerable to any, but to those who would hardly be considered without it: for in that case indeed there may be great need of an outside, when there is little or nothing within.

And thus also it is with the most necessary and important truths; to adorn and clothe them is to cover them, and that to obscure them. The eternal salvation and damnation of souls are not things to be treated of with jests and witticisms. And he who thinks to furnish himself out of plays and romances with language from the pulpit, shows himself much fitter to act a part in the revels, than for a cure of souls.

"I speak the words of soberness," said Saint Paul (Acts 26:25), "and I preach the gospel not with the 'enticing words of man's wisdom'" (1 Cor. 2:4). This was the way of the apostle's discoursing of things sacred. Nothing here "of the fringes of the north star"; nothing of "nature's becoming unnatural"; nothing of the "down of angels' wings," or "the beautiful locks of cherubims": no starched similitudes introduced with a "Thus have I seen a cloud rolling in

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its airy mansion," and the apostolic spirit. For the apostles, poor mortals, were content to take lower steps, and to tell the world in plain terms, "that he who believed should be saved, and that he who believed not should be damned." And this was the dialect which pierced the conscience, and made the hearers cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" It tickled not the ear, but sunk into the heart: and when men came from such sermons, they never commended the preacher for his taking voice or gesture; for the fineness of such a simile, or the quaintness of such a sentence; but they spoke like men conquered with the overpowering force and evidence of the most concerning truths; much in the words of the two disciples going to Emmaus: "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

In a word, the apostles' preaching was therefore mighty, and successful, because plain, natural, and familiar, and by no means above the capacity of their hearers; nothing being more preposterous than for those who were professedly aiming at men's hearts to miss the mark by shooting over their heads.

SOUTH

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**CONCISENESS AND DIFFUSENESS**

The concise writer, aiming to express himself in the briefest possible manner, rejects as redundant everything not material to the sense. He presents a thought but once, and then in its most striking light. His sentences are compact and strong rather than harmonious, and suggest more than they directly express.

The diffuse writer, on the other hand, presents his thoughts in a variety of lights, and endeavors by repetition to make himself perfectly understood. Fond of amplification, he indulges in long sentences making up by copiousness what he lacks in strength.

Each of these styles has its beauties, and each becomes faulty when carried to excess. Too great conciseness produces abruptness and obscurity; while extreme diffuseness dilutes the thought, and makes but a feeble impression on the reader. In deciding to which of these qualities it is best to incline in any particular instance, we should be controlled by the nature of the subject. Discourses intended for delivery require a more copious style than matter which is to be printed and read at leisure. When, as in the case of the latter, there is an opportunity of pausing and reviewing what is not at first understood, greater brevity is allowable than



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when the meaning has to be caught from the words of a speaker, and is thus, if too tersely exprest, liable to be lost. As a general thing, in descriptions, essays, and sublime and impassioned writing, it is safer to incline to conciseness. The interest is thus kept alive, the attention is riveted, and the reader's mind finds agreeable exercise in following out the ideas suggested, without being fully presented, by the author.

The most concise, as well as the simplest, writers are found among the ancients. Aristotle and Tacitus, above all others, are characterized by terseness and brevity of expression: the former, indeed, in a greater degree than propriety allows. The genius of our language, as we have already seen, is opposed to the pointed brevity which constitutes the principal charm of the classics. We shall therefore find comparatively few specimens of concise composition in our literature; while, on the contrary, we can boast of many writers who, in elegant diffuseness, will not compare unfavorably with Cicero, the great model of antiquity in this variety of style.

G. P. QUACKENBOS

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**BOLDNESS OFTEN NECESSARY**

We know that simplicity and perspicuity are important qualities of style; but there are vastly nobler and more important ones, such as energy and richness, and in these Milton is not surpassed. The best style is not that which puts the reader most easily and in the shortest time in possession of a writer's naked thoughts; but that which is the truest image of a great intellect, which conveys fully and carries farthest into other souls the conceptions and feelings of a profound and lofty spirit. To be universally intelligible is not the highest merit. A great mind can not, without injurious constraint, shrink itself to the grasp of common passive readers. Its natural movement is free, bold, and majestic, and it ought not to be required to part with these attributes, that the multitude may keep pace with it. A full mind will naturally overflow in long sentences, and, in the moment of inspiration, when thick-coming thoughts and images crowd upon it, will often pour them forth in a splendid confusion, dazzling to common readers, but kindling to congenial spirits. There are writings which are clear through their shallowness. We must not expect in the ocean the transparency of the calm inland stream. For ourselves, we love what is called easy reading perhaps too well.

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especially in our hours of relaxation; but we love, too, to have our faculties tasked by master spirits. We delight in long sentences, in which a great truth, instead of being broken up into numerous periods, is spread out in its full proportions, is irradiated with variety of illustration and imagery, is set forth in a splendid affluence of language, and flows like a full stream, with a majestic harmony which fills at once the ear and soul.

CHANNING

### **CLEARNESS ESSENTIAL**

As a rule, the student will do well to banish for the present all thought of ornament or elegance, and to aim only at expressing himself plainly and clearly. The best ornament is always that which comes unsought. Let him not beat about the bush, but go straight to the point. Let him remember that which is written is meant to be read; that time is short; and that—other things being equal—the fewer words the better. . . . Repetition is a far less serious fault than obscurity. Young writers are often unduly afraid of repeating the same word, and require to be reminded that it is always better to use the right word over again than to replace it by a wrong one—and a word which is liable to be misunderstood is a wrong one. A frank



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repetition of a word has even sometimes a kind of charm—as bearing the stamp of truth, the foundation of all excellence of style.

HALL

**STYLE IS PERSONAL**

While the many use language as they find it, the man of genius uses it indeed, but subjects it withal to his own purposes, and molds it according to his own peculiarities. The throng and succession of ideas, thoughts, feelings, imaginations, aspirations, which pass within him, the abstractions, the juxtapositions, the comparisons, the discriminations, the conceptions, which are so original in him, his views of external things, his judgments upon life, manners, and history, the exercises of his wit, of his humor, of his depth, of his sagacity, all these innumerable and incessant creations, the very pulsation and throbbing of his intellect, does he image forth, to all does he give utterance, in a corresponding language, which is as multiform as this inward mental action itself and analogous to it, the faithful expression of his intense personality, attending on his own inward world of thought as its very shadow: so that we might as well say that one man's shadow is another's as that the style of a really gifted mind can be-

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long to any but himself. It follows him about as a shadow. His thought and feelings are personal, and so his language is personal.

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

## **SUPERFICIAL WRITING**

Fine writing is generally the effect of spontaneous thoughts and a labored style. Long sentences in a short composition are like large rooms in a little house. The world may be divided into people that read, people that write, people that think, and fox-hunters. Superficial writers, like the mole, often fancy themselves deep, when they are exceeding near the surface.

WILLIAM SHENSTONE

## **CARLYLE'S STYLE**

There is in Carlyle's fiercer and more serious passages a fiery glow of enthusiasm or indignation, in his lighter ones a quaint felicity of unexpected humor, in his expositions a vividness of presentment, in his arguments a sledge-hammer force, all of which are not to be found together anywhere else, and none of which is to be found anywhere in quite the same form. And despite the savagery, both of his indignation and his

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laughter, there is no greater master of tenderness. Wherever he is at home, and he seldom wanders far from it, the weapon of Carlyle is like none other—it is the very sword of Goliath.

SAINTSBURY

### WORDS THAT COME AND GO

There is a very curious province of our language, in which we were once so rich, that extensive losses here have failed to make us poor; so many of its words still arriving, even after as many or more have disappeared. I refer to those words which either contain within themselves a strong riming modulation, such, for example, as “willy-nilly,” “hocus-pocus,” “helter-skelter,” “tag-rag,” “namby-pamby,” “pell-mell,” “hodge-podge”; or with a slight difference from this, tho belonging to the same group, those of which the characteristic feature is not this internal likeness with initial unlikeness, but initial likeness with internal unlikeness; not riming, but strongly alliterative, and in every case with a change of the interior vowel from a weak into a strong, generally from “i” into “a” or “o”; as “shilly-shally,” “mingle-mangle,” “tittle-tattle,” “prittle-prattle,” “riff-raff,” “see-saw,” “slip-slop.” No one who is not quite out of love with the homelier yet more vigorous portions of the



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language, but will acknowledge the life and strength which there is often in these and in others still current among us. But of the same sort what vast numbers have fallen out of use, some so fallen out of all remembrance that it may be difficult almost to find credence for them. Thus take of riming the following: "hugger-mugger," "hurly-burly," "kicksy-wicksy" (all in Shakespeare); "hibber-gibber," "rusty-dusty," "horrel-lorrel," "slaump-paump" (all in Gabriel Harvey), "royster-doyster" (Old Play), "hoddy-doddy" (Ben Jonson); while of alliterative might be instanced these: "skimble-skamble," "bible-babble" (both in Shakespeare), "twittle-twattle," "kim-kam" (both in Holland), "hab-nab" (Lilly), "trim-tram," "trish-trash," "swish-swash" (all in Gabriel Harvey), "whim-wham" (Beaumont and Fletcher), "mizz-mazz" (Locke), "snip-snap" (Pope), "flim-flam" (Swift), "tric-trac," and others.

TRENCH

## REDUNDANCY UNDESIRABLE

As a general rule, redundancy is injurious; and the reason of the rule will enable us to discriminate when redundancy is injurious and when beneficial. It is injurious when it hampers the rapid movement of the reader's mind, diverting his attention to some col-

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lateral detail. But it is beneficial when its retarding influence is such as only to detain the mind longer on the thought, and thus to secure the fuller effect of the thought. For rapid reading is often imperfect reading. The mind is satisfied with a glimpse of that which it ought to have steadily contemplated; and any artifice by which the thought can be kept long enough before the mind may indeed be a redundancy as regards the meaning, but is an economy of power. Thus we see that the phrase or the clause which we might be tempted to lop away because it threw no light upon the proposition, would be retained by a skilful writer because it added power. You may know the character of a redundancy by this one test: does it divert the attention, or simply retard it? The former is always a loss of power; the latter is sometimes a gain of power. The art of the writer consists in rejecting all redundancies that do not conduce to clearness. The shortest sentences are not necessarily the clearest. Concision gives energy, but it also adds restraint. The labor of expanding a terse sentence to its full meaning is often greater than the labor of picking out the meaning from a diffuse and loitering passage. Tacitus is more tiresome than Cicero.

GEORGE HENRY LEWES

## WRITING AND READING

### STYLE COMPARED

Between the language of Milton and Brougham there is as much difference as between an organ and a bagpipe. One of these instruments fills, and makes to vibrate, the amplest, loftiest, and most venerable edifices, and accords with all that is magnificent and holy; the other is followed by vile animals in fantastical dresses and antic gestures, and surrounded by the clamorous and disorderly.

LANDOR

### AVOID CIRCUMLOCUTION

The praises which have been bestowed on copiousness of diction have probably tended to mislead authors into a cumbrous verbosity. It should be remembered that there is no real copiousness in a multitude of synonyms and circumlocutions. A house would not be the better furnished for being stored with ten times as many of some kinds of articles as were needed, while it was perhaps destitute of those required for other purposes; nor was Lucullus's wardrobe, which, according to Horace, boasted five thousand mantles, necessarily well stocked, if other articles of dress were wanting. The completeness of a library does not consist in the number of volumes,



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especially if many of them are duplicates; but in its containing copies of each of the most valuable works. And in like manner true copiousness of language consists in having at command, as far as possible, a suitable expression for each different modification of thought. This, consequently, will often save much circumlocution; so that the greater our command of language, the more concisely we shall be enabled to write.

WHATELY

**EMERSON'S STYLE**

Some things he has published will live as long as the language itself; but much of his verse, constructed upon whims rather than under the influence of the spirit of poetry, will die among the short-lived oddities of the day. Much of his prose, too, the product of imitation, unconscious perhaps of vicious foreign models, can scarcely be expected to survive the charm which hangs about his person and lingers in the magic tones of his voice. Mr. Emerson is a great writer, and an honest and independent thinker, on the whole. He is not, however, what one of the idolaters has lately called him, a Phoebus Apollo, descended from Olympus with hurtling arrows and the silver twanging bow. . . . His style is often musical, clear, and brilliant; words are selected with so rare a felicity that they

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have the shine of diamonds, and they cut their meaning on the reader's mind as the diamond's edge leaves its trace deep and sharp on the surface of glass. But, by and by, we fall upon a passage which either conveys no distinct sense, or in which some very commonplace thought is made to sound with the clangor of a braying trumpet. Quaintness of thought and expression is his easily besetting sin; and here lies the secret of his sympathy with Carlyle, that highly gifted master of oddity and affectation. As a writer, Mr. Emerson is every way Carlyle's superior, would he but let the Carlylese dialect alone. He had more imagination, more refinement and subtlety of thought, more taste in style, more exquisite sense of rhythm. Perhaps his range of intellectual vision is not so broad. He has not the learning of Carlyle, nor the abundant humor, which sometimes reconciles us even to absurdity. But Mr. Emerson has a more delicate wit, a wit often quite irresistible by its unexpected turns, and the sudden introduction of effective contrasts. Carlyle has an extraordinary abundance of words, a store of epithets, good, bad, and indifferent, by which the reader is often flooded; Emerson is more temperate and artistic.

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON

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### **DEEP FEELING ESSENTIAL**

The deeply moved soul will speak strongly,  
and ought to speak so as to move and shake  
nations.

CHANNING

### **ACQUIRE THE "NOTE-BOOK" HABIT**

Keep a note-book beside you, and jot down as briefly as you please any facts or lines of argument or sentences that strike you. If the keeping of a note-book be a care too harassing for you, then, if the book be your own, write your own notes on the margin with a pencil. We might recommend to you a set of signs; but each one can easily invent for himself a system of marks to denote, as the case may be, that he approves or disapproves of a sentiment, that he doubts or disputes a statement, that he thinks the style clear or obscure, vigorous or commonplace, elegant or clumsy, pathetic or humorous. Note-taking may thus be done in various ways, but done in some way it must be. Without it you can not be intelligent readers. For how can you be intelligent without being discriminating; and how can you be discriminating without distinguishing between the good and the bad, the remarkable and the commonplace; and how can you distinguish between these with-



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out affixing some distinctive marks? You will find, too, that all great scholars have been great note-takers. They have proved themselves in their reading as well as in other things men of *mark*. Locke, Southey, Sir William Hamilton, never read without having their note-books and commonplace books beside them, into which they put, for future use, all the valuable facts and ideas upon which they alighted. Their memories were unusually great and tenacious, but they treated their memories with the utmost consideration. They used their note-book as a sort of outside palpable memory of holding minute yet important details, which their inner and real memory could not have retained without much wearisome toil.

DAVID PRYDE

## THE SELECTION OF BOOKS

The union of freedom with authority—of a choice for one's self, and a willingness to believe that the world is right in setting Shakespeare above Swinburne, and Homer above Tupper—is, I believe, the true and only guide in the selection of books to read. In the long run, nothing but truth, simplicity, purity, and a lofty purpose approves a book to the favor of the ages, and nothing else ought to approve it to the individual reader. Thus the end is reached, and the choice is

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made, not by taking a book because a "course of reading" commands you to do so, but because you come to see for yourself the wisdom of the selection. The pure and wholesome heart of humanity—that thing which we call conscience—is the guide of the readers as it is of every other class of workers in life.

CHARLES FRANCIS RICHARDSON

**SOME WORDS EXPLAINED**

"Heaven" is only the perfect of "to heave"; and is so called because it is "heaved" or "heaven" up, being properly the sky as it is raised aloft; while the "earth" is that which is "eared" or plowed; the "smith" has his name from the sturdy blows that he "smites" upon the anvil; "wrong" is the perfect participle of "to wring," that which one has "wrung" or wrested from the right; just as in French "tort," from "torqueo," is that which is twisted; "guilt" of "to guile" or "beguile"; to find "guilt" in a man is to find that he has been "beguiled," that is, by the devil, "instigante diabolo," as it is asserted in all indictments for murder, the forms of which come down to us from a time when men were not ashamed of tracing evil to his inspiration. The "brunt" of the battle is the "heat" of the battle, where it "burns" the most fiercely. "Haft," as of a

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knife, is properly only the participle perfect of "to have," that whereby you "have" or hold it. "Strong" is the participle past of "to string"; a "strong" man means no more than one whose sinews are firmly "strung." The "left" hand, as distinguished from the right, is the hand which we "leave"; inasmuch as for twenty times we use the right hand, we do not once employ it; and it obtains its name from being "left" unused so often. "Odd" is, I believe, properly "owed"; an "odd" glove, or an "odd" shoe is one that is "owed" to another, or to which another is "owed," for the making of a pair—just as we speak of a man being "singular," wanting, that is, his match. "Wild" is the participle past of "to will"; a "wild" horse is a "willed" or self-willed horse, one that has been never tamed or taught to submit its will to the will of another; and so with a man.

TRENCH

## SIXTEENTH-CENTURY PROSE

Generally it may be observed, with regard to the English prose of the earlier part of the sixteenth century, that it is both more simple in its construction, and of a more purely native character in other respects, than the style which came into fashion in the latter years of the Elizabethan period. When first



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made use of in prose composition, the mother-tongue was written as it was spoken; even such artifices and embellishments as are always prompted by the nature of verse were here scarcely aspired after or thought of; that which was addrest to and specially intended for the instruction of the people was set down as far as possible in the familiar forms and fashions of the popular speech, in genuine native words, and direct unencumbered sentences; no painful imitation of any learned or foreign model was attempted, nor any species of elaboration whatever, except what was necessary for mere perspicuity, in a kind of writing which was scarcely regarded as partaking of the character of literary composition at all. The delicacy of a scholarly taste no doubt influenced even the English style of such writers as More and his more eminent contemporaries or immediate followers; but whatever eloquence or dignity their compositions thus acquired was not the effect of any profest or conscious endeavor to write in English as they would have written in what were called the learned tongues.

**CRAIK**

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## WRITING AND READING

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### SENTENCES SHOULD NOT BE TOO CONCISE

A style which rigidly interpreted the precepts of economy, simplicity, sequence, and climax, which rejected all superfluous words and redundant ornaments, adopted the easiest and most logical arrangement, and closed every sentence and every paragraph with a climax, might be a very perfect bit of mosaic, but would want the glow and movement of a living mind. Monotony would settle on it like a paralyzing frost. A series of sentences in which every phrase was a distinct thought, would no more serve as pabulum for the mind, than portable soup freed from all the fibrous tissues of meat and vegetable would serve as food for the body. Animals perish from hunger in the presence of pure albumen; and minds would lapse into idiocy in the presence of unadulterated thought. But without invoking extreme cases, let us simply remember the psychological fact that it is as easy for sentences to be too compact as for food to be too concentrated; and that many a happy negligence, which to microscopic criticism may appear defective, will be the means of giving clearness and grace to a style. Of course, the indolent indulgence in this laxity robs style of all grace and power. But monotony in the structure of sentences, monotony of

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cadence, monotony of climax, monotony anywhere, necessarily defeats the very aim and end of style; it calls attention to the manner; it blunts the sensibilities; it renders excellences odious.

**GEORGE HENRY LEWES**

### **THE CONCLUSION OF THE SENTENCE**

Let there be nothing harsh or abrupt in the conclusion of the sentence, for on that conclusion the mind pauses and rests. This is the most material part in the structure of discourse. Here every one expects to be gratified.

**QUINTILIAN**

### **STYLE WILL VARY WITH MOOD AND FEELING**

Why is Johnson pompous, Goldsmith simple? Why is one author abrupt, another rhythmical, another concise? Evidently in each case the habitual mode of utterance must depend upon the habitual balance of the nature. The predominant feelings have by use trained the intellect to represent them. But while long, tho unconscious, discipline has made it do this efficiently, it remains, from lack of practise, incapable of doing the same for the less active feelings; and when these are ex-



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cited, the usual verbal forms undergo but slight modifications. Let the powers of speech be fully developed, however—let the ability of the intellect to utter the emotions be complete; and this fixity of style will disappear. The perfect writer will express himself as Junius, when in the Junius frame of mind; when he feels as Lamb felt, will use a like familiar speech; and will fall into the ruggedness of Carlyle when in a Carlylean mood. Now he will be rhythmical and now irregular; here his language will be plain and there ornate; sometimes his sentences will be balanced and at other times unsymmetrical; for a while there will be considerable sameness, and then again great variety. His mode of expression naturally responding to his state of feeling, there will flow from his pen a composition changing to the same degree that the aspects of his subject change.

HERBERT SPENCER

## **THE USE OF CONNECTIVES**

A close reasoner and a good writer is generally known by his pertinent use of connectives. Read a page of Johnson; you can not alter one conjunction without spoiling the sense. It is a linked strain throughout.

COLERIDGE

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**HOW TO GAIN CLEARNESS**

Clearness is most obviously associated with the word and the structure. If an author has carefully considered his work and the unity of his composition; if he has massed it properly in parts and as a whole, if he has looked well to its coherence—it is hardly possible that he should fail of being readily understood. Close attention to the mechanics of style will generally make a writer intelligible, provided always, that he wishes his meaning to be apprehended easily, and that he himself knows what he is attempting to say. It is no less needful to appeal to the average emotional experiences of mankind in order to be clear to the general reader. It must be remembered that all art is based on the assumption of a community of human feelings; in other words, upon the theory that the fundamental emotions are shared by all mankind. The more closely a writer holds to common humanity, to common human experience, the more wide will be the range of his work, and the more clear will he be in those very matters where clearness is most difficult of attainment. To gain clearness it is necessary first to avoid all vagueness of thought and all vagueness of expression. It is needful to shun ambiguity of word or of phrase, and that more subtle ambiguity which

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may arise from ill-considered paragraphing, from misproportion, or from bad arrangement of the parts of a composition. Finally, it is no less important to write with a constant remembrance of the audience address; to use their language and to appeal to the experiences which are likely to be common to the average individual. These are the principles upon which have been written the masterpieces of the world.

ARLO BATES

## **THE VALUE OF BOOKS**

Were I to pray for a taste which should stand me instead under every variety of circumstances, and be a source of happiness and cheerfulness to me during life, and a shield against its ills, however things might go amiss, and the world frown upon me, it would be a taste for reading. Give a man this taste, and the means of gratifying it, and you can hardly fail of making him a happy man: unless, indeed, you put into his hands a most perverse selection of books. You place him in contact with the best society in every period of history—with the wisest, the wittiest, the tenderest, the bravest, and the purest characters who have adorned humanity. You make him a denizen of all nations, a contemporary of all ages.

SIR JOHN HERSCHEL



**THE POWER OF LANGUAGE**

We can always heighten the emotion by the figures which we introduce, leading the imagination to a train of agreeable or disagreeable, of exalting or debasing ideas which correspond to the impressions that we choose to make. When we want to render an object beautiful or magnificent, we borrow images from the most beautiful or splendid scenes of nature; we thereby throw a luster over our object; we enliven the reader's mind and dispose him to go along with us in the various impressions which we give him of the subject. All this leads us to reflect on the wonderful power of language. What a fine vehicle it has now become for all the conceptions of the human mind. Not content with a simple communication of ideas, it paints these ideas to the eye in the most forcible and beautiful manner through the medium of figurative language. So that language, from being a rude and imperfect interpreter of men's wants and necessities, has now passed into an instrument of the most delicate and refined luxury.

**BLAIR**

## **WRITING AND READING**

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### **FIRST KNOW YOUR MEANING**

In order to form a good style, the primary rule and condition is, not to attempt to express ourselves in language before we thoroughly know our own meaning—when a man perfectly understands himself, appropriate diction will generally be at his command either in writing or speaking. In such cases the thoughts and the words are associated. In the next place preciseness in the use of terms is required, and the test is whether you can translate the phrase adequately into simpler terms, regard being had to the feeling of the whole passage. Try this upon Shakespeare, or Milton, and see if you can substitute other simpler words in any given passage without a violation of the meaning or tone. The source of bad writing is the desire to be something more than a man of sense—the straining to be thought a genius; and it is just the same in speech-making. If men would only say what they have to say in plain terms, how much more eloquent they would be!

**COLERIDGE**

**THE CULTIVATION OF TASTE**

The taste is common to all men, yet they by no means possess it in the same degree. There are some endowed with feelings so blunt, and tempers so cold and phlegmatic, that they hardly receive any sensible impressions even from the most striking objects; others are capable of appreciating only the coarsest kind of beauties, and for these have no strong or decided relish; while in a third class pleasurable emotions are excited by the most delicate graces. There seems, indeed, to be a greater difference between men as respects taste than in point of common sense, reason, or judgment. In this Nature discovers her beneficence. In the faculties necessary to man's well-being, she makes little distinction between her children; whereas those that have reference rather to the ornamental part of life she bestows sparingly and capriciously, and requires a higher culture for bringing them to perfection. This difference in the degrees of taste possessed by men is owing, in a great measure, as we have seen, to nature; which has endowed some with more sensitive organs than others, and thus made them capable of greater intellectual enjoyment. Yet education has even more to do than nature with the formation of taste; a fact which becomes obvious when we compare



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barbarous with enlightened nations in this respect, or contrast such individuals of the latter as have paid attention to liberal studies with the uncultivated and vulgar. We shall at once perceive an almost incredible difference in the degrees of taste which they respectively possess—a difference attributable to nothing but the education of the faculty in the one case and its neglect in the other. Hence it follows that taste is eminently an improvable faculty; and in the case of this, as well as the mental and bodily powers, exercise is to be regarded as the great source of health and strength.

G. P. QUACKENBOS

### **SAXON WORDS ARE MOST FORCEFUL**

The superiority possessed by Saxon English is its comparative brevity. If it be an advantage to express an idea in the smallest number of words, then will it be an advantage to express it in the smallest number of syllables. If circuitous phrases and needless expletives distract the attention and diminish the strength of the impression produced, then do surplus articulations also. A certain effort must be required to recognize every vowel and consonant; some attention is absorbed by each syllable. Hence, the shortness of Saxon words becomes a reason for their greater force.

HERBERT SPENCER

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**HOW REFINED TASTE AFFECTS WORDS**

The advance of refinement causes words to be foregone, which are felt to speak too plainly. It is not here merely that one age has more delicate ears than another; this is something; but besides this, and even if this delicacy were at a standstill, there would still be a continual process going on, by which the words, which for a certain while have been employed to designate coarse or disagreeable facts or things, would be disallowed, or at least relinquished to the lower classes of society, and others assumed in their place. The former by long use being felt to have come into too direct and close relation with that which they designate, to summon it up too distinctly before the mind's eye, they are thereupon exchanged for other words, which, at first at least, indicate more lightly and at a greater distance the offensive thing, rather hint and suggest than paint and describe it; altho by and by these new will be themselves also probably discarded, and for the same reasons which brought about the dismissal of those which they replaced.

**TRENCH**

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### DEFINITION OF A NOVELIST

What is a novelist? In my opinion he is a psychologist, who naturally and involuntarily sets psychology at work; he is nothing else, nor more. He loves to picture feelings, to perceive their connections, their precedents, their consequences; and he indulges in this pleasure. In his eyes there are forces, having various directions and magnitudes. About their justice or injustice he troubles himself little. He introduces them in characters, conceives the dominant quality, perceives the traces which this leaves on the others, marks the discordant or harmonious influence of temperament, of education, of occupation, and labors to manifest the invisible world of inward inclinations and dispositions by the visible world of outward words and actions. To this is his labor reduced. Whatever these bents are, he cares little. A genuine painter sees with pleasure a well-shaped arm and vigorous muscles, even if they be employed in knocking down a man. A genuine novelist enjoys the contemplation of the greatness of a harmful sentiment, or the organized mechanism of a pernicious character. He has sympathy with talent, because it is the only faculty which exactly copies nature: occupied in experiencing the emotions of his personages, he only dreams of marking



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their vigor, kind, and mutual action. He represents them to us as they are, whole, not blaming, not punishing, not mutilating them; he transfers them to us intact and separate, and leaves to us the right of judging if we desire it. His whole effort is to make them visible, to unravel the types darkened and altered by the accidents and imperfections of real life, to set in relief grand human passions, to be shaken by the greatness of the beings whom he animates, to raise us out of ourselves by the force of his creations. We recognize art in this creative power, impartial and universal as nature, freer and more potent than nature, taking up the rough-drawn or disfigured work of its rival in order to correct its faults and give effect to its conceptions.

H. A. TAINE

**THE SUBLIME IN WRITING**

For a literary composition to possess sublimity, it is necessary that the subject be sublime; that, if a scene or natural object, it be one which, exhibited to us in reality, would inspire us with thoughts of the elevated, awful, and magnificent character that has been described. This excludes what is merely beautiful, gay, or elegant. If it be attempted, with the aid of rhetoric, to make any such object the theme of a sublime com-

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position, the effort will prove a failure, and bombast or frigidity of style will result. We shall find, then, that the passages generally accounted sublime are, for the most part, descriptions of the natural objects mentioned in the last lesson as capable of producing the emotion of grandeur; or, in other words, of what is vast, mighty, magnificent, obscure, dark, solemn, loud, pathetic, or terrible.

G. P. QUACKENBOS

### THE BIBLE

The authorized translation of the Bible, on the whole so admirable both for correctness and beauty of style, is apt, on the first thought, to be regarded as exhibiting the actual state of the language in the time of James I, when it was first published. It is to be remembered, however, that the new translation was formed, by the special directions of the king, upon the basis of that of Parker's, or the Bishops' Bible, which had been made nearly forty years before, and which had itself been founded upon that of Cranmer, made in the reign of Henry VIII. The consequence is, as Hallam has remarked, that, whether the style of King James's translation be the perfection of the English language or no, it is not the language of his reign. "It may, in the eyes of many," adds

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Hallam, "be a better English, but it is not the English of Daniel, or Raleigh, or Bacon, as any one may easily perceive. It abounds, in fact, especially in the Old Testament, with obsolete phraseology, and with single words long since abandoned, or retained only in provincial use." This is, perhaps, rather strongly put; for altho the preceding version served as a general guide to the translators, and was not needlessly deviated from, they have evidently modernized its style, not perhaps quite up to that of their own day, but so far, we apprehend, as to exclude nearly all words and phrases that had then passed out even of common and familiar use. In that theological age, indeed, few forms of expression found in the Bible could well have fallen altogether into desuetude, altho some may have come to be less apt and significant than they once were, or than others that might now be substituted for them. But we believe the new translators, in any changes they made, were very careful to avoid the employment of any mere words of yesterday, the glare of whose recent coinage would have contrasted offensively with the general antique color of diction which they decided to retain. The English Bible is a tissue of wonderful cadences and perfect felicities of language.

CRAIK



## WRITING AND READING

### THE TEST OF GOOD PROSE

"In good prose," says Frederic Schlegel, "every word should be underlined"; that is, every word should be the right word; and then no word would be righter than another. It comes to the same thing, where all words are italics, one may as well use roman. There are no italics in Plato, because there are no unnecessary or unimportant words. It is a sign of taste in writing or speaking that it needs few italicized or emphatic words.

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

### THE EFFECT OF VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

It is evident that words are most agreeable to the ear which are composed of smooth and liquid sounds, where there is a proper intermixture of vowels and consonants; without too many harsh consonants rubbing against each other; or too many open vowels in succession, to cause a hiatus or disagreeable opening of the mouth. It may always be assumed as a principle, that whatever sounds are difficult in pronunciation, are, in the same proportion, harsh and painful to the ear. Vowels give softness, consonants strengthen the sounds of words. The music of language

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requires a just proportion of both. As to words, long words are commonly more agreeable to the ear than monosyllables—they please it by the succession of sounds which they present to it. Among words of any length those are the most musical which present an intermixture of long and short syllables. A third consideration is the disposition of words in a sentence; for, let the words themselves be ever so well chosen and well sounding, yet if they be ill-disposed, the music of the sentence is utterly lost.

BLAIR

**THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE**

Language is beyond doubt a divine institution, invented by the Deity and by Him made known to the human race. If language was devised by man, the invention could not have been at once matured, but must have been the result of necessities and experience of successive generations. This, however, does not accord with the facts of history; for, however far we go back, we can not arrive at any period when even the most unenlightened portions of mankind did not possess a system of language. Scripture informs us that this means of communication was employed by the first man and woman, as well as their immediate descendants; and we are

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hence forced to the conclusion that it was the result of a direct revelation from on high. Nevertheless, while the elements were thus imparted by God, it is natural to suppose that much was left for man to perfect; and that, just as a mind was given to him which he is required to cultivate and fit for the performance of its duties by a long course of training, so the mere elements were imparted, out of which he had to form by successive improvements a perfect means of communication. "Three things," says Scaliger, "have contributed to enable man to perfect language: necessity, practise, and the desire to please. Necessity produced a collection of words very imperfectly connected; practise, in multiplying them, gave them more expression; while it is to the desire of pleasing that we owe those agreeable turns, those happy collocations of words, which impart to phrases both elegance and grace."

We are confirmed in this supposition by the fact that the history of many languages shows a gradual progress from imperfect beginnings to a finished state, and that there is hardly any cultivated tongue, which, if traced back to its earlier ages, will not be found either defective in some of its parts or wanting in those characteristics which are a source of beauty and strength. The language of a nation, traced through the successive eras of its existence, will be found to have undergone



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a series of improvements in all respects analogous to the advances which have been made in the institutions and social condition of the people who speak it.

G. P. QUACKENBOS

**THE STUDY OF WORDS**

A lover of his native tongue will tremble to think what that tongue would have become, if all the vocables from the Latin and the Greek which were then introduced or endorsed by illustrious names, had been admitted on the strength of their recommendation; if "torve" and "tetric" (Fuller), "cecity" (Hooker), "inmanity" (Shakespeare), "insulse" and "insulsity" (Milton, prose), "scelestick" (Feltham), "lepid" and "sufflamine" (Barrow), "immorigerous," "clancular," "ferity," "hyperaspist," "stultiloquy" (all in Jeremy Taylor), "pauciloquy" and "multiloquy" (Beaumont, Psyche); if "dyscolous" (Foxye), "moliminously" (Cudworth), "immarcescible" (Bishop Hall), "arride" (ridiculed by Ben Jonson), with the hundreds of other words like these, and even more monstrous than are some of these, not to speak of such Italian as "legiadrous" (Beaumont, Psyche), had not been rejected and disallowed by the true instinct of the national mind.

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A great many, too, *were* allowed and adopted, but not exactly in the shape in which they first were introduced among us; they were made to drop their foreign termination, or otherwise their foreign appearance, to conform themselves to English ways, and only so were finally incorporated into the great family of English words. Thus "pantomimi" (Lord Bacon) soon became "pantomimes"; "atomi" (Lord Brooke) "atoms"; "epocha" (Dryden) became "epoch"; "epitheton" (Cowell) "epithet"; "effigies" and "statua" (both in Shakespeare), "effigy" and "statue"; not otherwise "pyramis" and "pyramides," which also are forms employed by him, became "pyramid" and "pyramids"; "colone" (Burton) "clown"; "apostata" (Massinger) became "apostate"; "despota" (Foxye), "despot"; "idioma" and "prosodia" (both in Daniel, prose) "idiom" and "prosody"; "preludium" (Beaumont, Psyche), "prelude"; "magnes" (Gabriel Harvey), "magnet"; "mummia" (Webster), "mummy"; "synonyma" (Milton, prose), "synonyms"; "dogmata" (Glanville), "dogmas"; "galaxias" (Foxye), "galaxy"; "heros" (Henry More), "hero"; "heroës" (a trisyllable in Spenser), "heroes"; and "satellites" (a quadrisyllable with Pope, and therefore still a Latin word), "satellites." Nor can that slight but widely extended change of "innocency," "indolency," "temperancy,"

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and the large family of words with similar termination, into "innocence," "indolence," "temperance" and the like, be regarded otherwise than as part of the same process.

TRENCH

### **EMPHATIC WORDS SHOULD BE IN EMPHATIC PLACES**

It must be the aim of an author who would write with energy, to avail himself of all the liberty which our language allows so to arrange his words that there shall be the least possible occasion for underscoring and italics; and this, of course, must be more carefully attended to by the writer than by the speaker; who may, by this mode of utterance, conceal, in great measure, a defect in this point. It may be worth observing, however, that some writers, having been taught that it is a fault of style to require many of the words to be in italics, fancy they avoid the fault by omitting those indications where they are really needed; which is no less absurd than to attempt remedying the intricacies of a road by removing the direction-posts. The proper remedy is, to endeavor to construct the style, that the collocation of the words may, as far as possible, direct the attention to those which are emphatic.

WHATELY



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### PUT YOURSELF IN THE OTHER MAN'S PLACE

Learn to sympathize with all your fellow creatures. Put yourselves in their position, and invest yourselves with their circumstances. Look at things from their point of view; and whenever you feel inclined to slight any person, try to fancy what you would have been if you had been born and brought up amid the same surroundings. You will come to the conclusion that you would have been very much the same as he is, and you will now be inclined to make less of his faults and more of his virtues than you would otherwise have done. Sympathy is the best of all the poetical graces. The poet has fancy, has imagination, has the gift of language, but he is sympathy, sympathy personified, a living embodiment of sympathy. Why is Shakespeare the greatest of poets? Because he has given the fullest and most faithful representation of all classes of mankind. How was he able to do this? Because his sympathy was boundless. His soul was not confined to his own narrow body. It roamed at large, and inhabited the whole of humanity. It entered the hearts of all men, from the king to the clown, felt and understood all their frailties, and represented them impartially and yet lovingly.

DAVID PRYDE

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**WANT OF BEAUTY IS FATAL**

Thought does not separate man from the brutes; for the brutes think: but man alone thinks beyond the moment and beyond himself. Speech does not separate them; for speech is common to all perhaps, more or less, articulate, and conveyed or received through different organs in the lower and more inert. Man's thought, which seems imperishable, loses its form, and runs along from proprietor to improprietor, like any other transitory thing, unless it is invested so becomingly and nobly that no successor can improve upon it, by any new fashion or combination. For want of beauty, many good things are passed and forgotten; and such ancient wisdom is overrun and hidden by a rampant verdure, succulent but unsubstantial. It would be invidious to bring forward proofs of this out of authors in poetry and prose, now living or lately dead. A distinction must, however, be made between what falls upon many, like rain, and what is purloined from a cistern or a conduit belonging to another man's house. There are things which were another's before they were ours, and are not less ours for that; not less than my estate is mine because it was my grandfather's. There are features, there are voices, there are thoughts, very smiliar in many; but when ideas strike the same chord in any two with the same intensity, the ex-

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pression must be nearly the same. Let those who look upon style as unworthy of much attention, ask themselves how many, in proportion to men of genius, have excelled in it. In all languages, ancient and modern, are there ten prose writers at once harmonious, correct, and energetic? Harmony and correctness are not uncommon separately, and force is occasionally with each; but when, excepting in Milton, where, among all the moderns, is energy to be found always in the right place? Even Cicero is defective here, and sometimes in the most elaborate of his orations. In the time of Milton it was not customary for men of abilities to address to the people at large what might inflame their passions. The appeal was made to the serious, to the well-informed, to the learned, and was made in the language of their studies. The phraseology of our Bible, on which no subsequent age has improved, was thought to carry with it solemnity and authority; and even when popular feelings were to be aroused to popular interests, the language of the prophets was preferred to the language of the vulgar. Hence, amid the complicated antagonisms of war there was more austerity than ferocity. The gentlemen who attended the court avoided the speech as they avoided the manners of their adversaries. Waller, Cowley, and South were resolved to refine what was already pure gold, and inadvertently



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threw into the crucible many old family jewels, deeply enmeshed within it. Eliot, Pyn, Selden, and Milton revered their father's house, and retained its rich language unmodified. Lord Brougham would make us believe that scarcely a sentence in Milton is easy, natural, and vernacular. Nevertheless, in all his dissertations, there are many which might appear to have been written in our days, if indeed any writer in our days were endowed with the same might and majesty. Even in his Treatise on Divorce, when the Bible was most open to him for quotation, and when he might be the most expected to recur to the grave and antiquated, he has often employed, in the midst of theological questions and juridical formularies, the plainest terms of his contemporaries. Even his arguments against prelacy, when he rises into poetry like the old prophets, and when his ardent words assume in their periphery the rounded form of verse, there is nothing stiff or constrained. I remember a glorious proof of this remark, which I believe I have quoted before, but no time is lost by reading it twice.

“ . . . But when God commands to take the trumpet,  
And blow a dolorous or thrilling blast,  
It rests not with man's will what he shall say,  
Or what he shall conceal.”

Was ever anything more like the inspiration it refers to?  
LANDOR

## **WRITING AND READING**

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### **NEVER CROWD YOUR STYLE**

In aiming at a concise style care must, of course, be taken that it be not crowded. The frequent recurrence of considerable ellipses, even when obscurity does not result from them, will produce an appearance of affected and laborious compression, which is offensive. The author who is studious of energetic brevity should aim at what might be a suggestive style; such, that is, as, without making a distinct, tho brief, mention of a multitude of particulars, shall put the hearer's mind into the same train of thought as the speaker's, and suggest to him more than is actually exprest.

Such a style may be compared to a good map, which marks distinctly the great outlines, setting down the principal rivers, towns, and mountains, leaving the imagination to supply the villages, hillocks, and streamlets; which, if they were all inserted in their due proportions, would crowd the map, tho, after all, they could not be discerned without a microscope.

**WHATELY.**

## **SOME HINTS ON TALKING**

I look upon a tedious talker, or what is generally known by the name of a story-teller, to be much more insufferable than even a prolix writer. An author may be tossed out of your hand, and thrown aside when he grows dull and tiresome; but such liberties are so far from being allowed toward your orators in common conversation, that I have known a challenge sent a person for going out of the room abruptly, and leaving a man of honor in the midst of a dissertation. The evil is at present so very common and epidemical, that there is scarce a coffee-house in town that has not some speakers belonging to it who utter their political essays and draw parallels out of Baker's *Chronicle* to almost every part of her majesty's reign. It was said of two ancient authors, who had very different beauties in their style, "That if you took a word from one of them, you only spoiled his eloquence; but if you took a word from the other, you spoiled his sense." I have often applied the first part of this criticism to several of these coffee-house speakers whom I have at present in my thoughts, tho the character that is given to the last of those authors is what I would recommend to the imitation of my loving countrymen. But it is not only public places of resort, but private



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clubs and conversations over a bottle, that are infested with this loquacious kind of animal, especially with that species which I comprehend under the name of a story-teller. I would earnestly desire these gentlemen to consider that no point of wit or mirth at the end of a story can atone for the half-hour that has been lost before they come at it. I would likewise lay it home to their serious consideration, whether they think that every man in the company has not a right to speak as well as themselves, and whether they do not think they are invading another man's property when they engross the time which should be divided equally among the company to their own private use?

**STEELE**

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

Flexibility, or susceptibility of accommodation to different styles and tastes, so as to be either grave or gay, forcible or tender, simple or imposing, as occasion may require, is one of the most important qualities that a language can possess, as regards both writing and speaking. To insure flexibility, three characteristics are essential; copiousness, capacity for changes of construction and arrangement, and strength and beauty as regards

individual words. The first two of these qualities we have seen that English possesses in a high degree; in the last it is not deficient. While, therefore, it is inferior in flexibility to Latin and Greek, and of modern languages perhaps to Italian, it is still capable of being used with success in any style; as must be apparent to all who examine the masterpieces which our literature has produced in the various departments of prose and poetry. It has been said above that our tongue is not deficient in harmony; and this is proved by the fact that it is capable of being formed into poetry without the aid of rime. Vowel sounds abound, and please the ear with their variety. The frequent recurrence of the hissing consonant *s*, however, has an unpleasant effect, which we have only partially removed by assigning to that letter, in certain positions, the sound of *z*, as in *is, these, ears, loves, resolves*, etc. The melody of our periods is also materially affected by our tendency to throw the accent of polysyllables back toward the beginning; to which tendency we are indebted for such awkward words as *temporarily, mischievously, mercenariness, miserableness*, and many others similarly discordant. Whatever may be said of the English language in other respects, in simplicity it undoubtedly surpasses the rest of European tongues. It is free from intricacies of case, declension, mood, and tense. Its words are subject to but few

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terminational changes. Its substantives have no distinctions of gender except what nature has made. Its adjectives admit of such changes only as are necessary to denote the degrees of comparison. Its verbs, instead of running through all the varieties of ancient conjugation, suffer few changes. With the help of prepositions and auxiliaries, all possible relations are exprest, while the words for the most part retain their forms unchanged. We lose from this, no doubt, in brevity and strength; but we gain vastly in simplicity. The arrangement of our words is, in consequence, less difficult, and our sentences are more readily understood. The rules of our syntax are exceedingly simple, and the acquisition of our language is easy in proportion.

G. P. QUACKENBOS

## **THE HISTORY OF WORDS**

You may perhaps remember that Horace, tracing in a few memorable lines the history of words, while he notes that many once current have now dropt out of use, does not therefore count that of necessity their race is forever run; on the contrary, he confidently anticipates a palingenesy for many among them: "*Multa renascentur, quæ jam ceci- dere*"; and I am convinced that there has



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been such in the case of our English words, to a far greater extent than we are generally aware. Words slip almost or quite as imperceptibly back into use as they once slipped out of it. Let me suggest a few facts in evidence of this. In the contemporary gloss which an anonymous friend of Spenser's furnished to his Shepherd's Calendar, "for the exposition of old words," as he declares, he thinks it expedient to include in his list the following, "dapper," "scathe," "askance," "sere," "embellish," "bevy," "forestall," "fain," with not a few others quite as familiar as these. In Skinner's Etymologicon (1671), there is another such list of obsolete words, and among these he includes "to dovetail," "elvish," "interlace" (enterlase), "encombred," "fantom" (fantome), "gawd," "glare," "masquerade" (mascarade), "oriental," "plumage," "pummel" (pomell), and "stew," that is, for fish. Who will say of the verb "to hollow" that it is now even obsolescent? and yet Wallis two hundred years ago observed—"it has almost gone out of use" (*fere desuevit*). It would be difficult to find an example of the verb, "to advocate," between Milton and Burke. Franklin, a close observer in such matters, as he was himself an admirable master of English style, considered the word to have sprung up during his own residence in Europe. In this, indeed, he was mistaken; it had only during this

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period revived. Johnson says of "jeopardy"—"it is not in use"; which certainly is not any longer true.

TRENCH

## WRITE WITH CARE

He who writes carelessly confesses thereby at the very outset that he does not attach much importance to his own thoughts. For it is only where a man is convinced of the truth and importance of his thoughts, that he feels the enthusiasm necessary for an untiring and assiduous effort to find the clearest, finest, and strongest expression for them—just as for sacred relics or priceless works of art there are provided silvern or golden receptacles. It was this feeling that led ancient authors, whose thoughts, expressed in their own words, have lived thousands of years, and therefore bear the honored title of *classics*, always to write with care. Plato, indeed, is said to have written the introduction to his "Republic" seven times over in different ways.

SCHOPENHAUER

## **WRITING SHOULD BE LIKE A WELL- WOVEN FABRIC**

The text of a great writer resembles a piece of Gobelin tapestry or some golden embroidery. Every page is from the same loom. You know every sentence by the texture, the color, and the design. Some books are like calico prints, you read them by the yard; the gay or gaudy pattern diverts or serves for common use. In some books, insipid, glaring pieces of flimsy meaning, without harmony or purpose—stare at the reader in every chapter. But in George Eliot's writing, for instance, every portion is part of one well-woven fabric, strong, dainty, and durable, and is as a wealthy garment of the mind.

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

## **CULTIVATE SIMPLICITY**

Simplicity is indispensable, and in Catullus it is often impossible that more simple language could be used; there is scarcely a word or a line which a lamenting mother in a cottage might not have employed.

COLERIDGE



## **WRITING AND READING**

### **THE USE OF ANTITHESIS**

It is, of course, impossible to lay down precise rules for determining, what will amount to excess, in the use of antithesis, or of any other figure: the great safeguard will be the formation of a pure taste, by the study of the most chaste writers, and unsparing self-correction. But one rule always to be observed in respect to the antithetical construction, is to remember that in a true antithesis the opposition is always in the ideas exprest. Some writers abound with a kind of mock-antithesis, in which the same, or nearly the same sentiment which is exprest by the first clause, is repeated in a second; or at least, in which there is but little of real contrast between the clauses which are exprest in a contrasted form. This kind of style not only produces disgust instead of pleasure, when once the artifice is detected, which it soon must be, but also, instead of the brevity and vigor resulting from true antithesis, labors under the fault of prolixity and heaviness. Sentences which might have been exprest as simple ones, are expanded into complex, by the addition of clauses, which add little or nothing to the sense; and which have been compared to the false handles and keyholes with which furniture is decorated, that serve no other purpose than to correspond to the real ones.

**WHATELY**

## **SOURCES OF MORAL SUBLIMITY**

The most fruitful sources of moral sublimity are these:

**I. Firmness is the cause of truth and justice.**

Of this species of heroism, ancient Roman history furnishes many distinguished examples. Brutus, with unyielding sternness sentencing his sons to death, for having conspired against their country; and Titus Manlius, ordering his son to the stake, for engaging with an enemy contrary to his command—excite in our minds the most elevated ideas. Socrates is another instance, who chose to die by hemlock, tho means of escape were in his power, because their employment might have been construed into an admission of guilt. Above all, among never-to-be-forgotten instances of the moral sublime, are to be mentioned the heroic deaths of the Christian martyrs, who amid tortures inconceivable, in flames and on the rack, testified to the reality of their faith.

**II. Generous self-sacrifice in behalf of another.**

The story of Damon and Pythias, the former of whom, having incurred the enmity of the tyrant Dionysius, was by him sentenced to death, furnishes us with two remarkable examples: first, that of Pythias, who remains as hostage during his friend's farewell visit to his family, on condition of suffering in his stead if he does not return at the appointed time; and, secondly, that of Damon, who, refusing to profit by the self-devotion of Pythias, comes back in season to redeem his pledge. We find another forcible illustration

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in the career of Coriolanus; when, after having been besought in vain by the leading men of Rome, he yields to his mother's tears and prayers, tho aware that the consequences will be fatal to himself, and consents to withdraw his army with the sad words, "Mother, thou hast saved Rome—but lost thy son!" Equally sublime is the self-devotion of Codrus, the last Athenian king. Informed by the oracle, that, in a battle which was about to take place, Athens or her king must perish, he rushed into the thickest of the fight, and by the sacrifice of himself saved, as he thought, his country.

### III. Self-possession and fearlessness in circumstances of danger.

Of such elevated emotion, an incident in the career of Cæsar affords a striking illustration. Crossing, on one occasion, a branch of the sea, he was overtaken by a tempest of such violence that the pilot declared himself unable to proceed, and was in the act of turning back. "*Quia times? Cæsarem vehis!*" "What do you fear? You carry Cæsar!" was the sublime reply. We have another example of heroism in Mucius Sævola, thrusting his arm into Porsenna's camp-fire, to show how he scorned his threatened tortures, and keeping it there with unmoved countenance till it was entirely consumed. More than this, we see the effect produced by the act; for Porsenna was so struck with it that he gave the youth, who had come to murder him, his life, and subsequently negotiated a peace with Rome.

### IV. Exalted patriotism.

Wolfe's death-scene embodies the height of the moral sublime. Wounded on the Plains of Abraham, in the very death-agony, he heard the distant shout, "They fly! they fly!" "Who fly?" eagerly asked the dying hero. "The enemy," replied one of his officers. "Then," said he, "I die



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happy!" and expired. Another notable instance, quoted by all French critics, occurs in one of Corneille's tragedies. In the famous combat between the Horatii and the Curiatii, the old Horatius, being informed that two of his sons are slain, and that the third has betaken himself to flight, at first will not believe the report; but, being thoroughly assured of the fact, he is filled with grief and indignation at this supposed unworthy behavior of his surviving son. He is reminded that his son stood alone against three, and is asked what he wished that he had done. "That he had died!" (Qu'il mourut!) is the reply.

G. P. QUACKENBOS

**SENSE THE BASIS OF STYLE**

Style is a quality peculiar to the writer or speaker, and where it has excellence not time itself can efface its charm. Facts may be forgotten, learning grow commonplace, truths dwindle into mere truisms, but a magnificent style can never lose its freshness. Some one has said, "For style, even more than for his wonderful erudition, is Gibbon admired; and the same quality, and that alone, renders Hume a popular historian of England, in spite of his imperfect learning, the untrustworthiness of his statements in matters of fact, and the anti-popular caste of his opinions." Method, perspicuity, brevity, variety, harmony, are indeed separable from sense, but no combination of such qualities will give life

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to a book without sense. They are but the auxiliaries of meaning, but the substitutes for it.

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

### DEFINITION OF A GREAT AUTHOR

The art of letters is the method by which a speaker or writer brings out in words worthy of his subject and sufficient for his audience or readers the thoughts which impress him. Literature is therefore of a *personal* character; it consists in the enunciations and teachings of those who have a right to speak as representatives of their kind, and in whose words their brethren find an interpretation of their own sentiments, a record of their own experiences, and a suggestion for their own judgments. A great author is not one who merely has a *copia verborum*, whether in prose or in verse, and can, as it were, turn out at his will any number of splendid phrases and swelling sentences; but he is one who has something to say, and knows how to say it. I do not claim for him, as such, any great depth of thought, or breadth of view, or philosophy, or sagacity, or knowledge of human nature, or experience of human life, tho these additional gifts he may have, and the more he has of them, the greater he is; but I ascribe to him, as his characteristic gift, in a large sense the

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faculty of expression. He is master of the twofold Logos, the thought and the word, distinct, but inseparable from each other. He may, if so be, elaborate his compositions, or he may pour out his improvisations; but in either case he has but one aim which he keeps steadily before him, and is conscientious and single-minded in fulfilling. That aim is to give forth what he has within him; and from his very earnestness it comes to pass that, whatever be the splendor of his diction or the harmony of his periods, he has within him the charm of an incommunicable simplicity. Whatever be his subject, high or low, he treats it suitably and for its own sake. If he is a poet, *nil moliter inepte*. If he is an orator, then, too, he speaks not only *distincte* and *splendide*, but also, *apte*. His page is the lucid mirror of his mind and life. . . . He writes passionately because he feels keenly; forcibly, because he conceives vividly, he sees too clearly to be vague; he is too serious to be otiose; he can analyze his subject, and therefore he is rich; he embraces it as a whole and in its parts, and therefore he is consistent; he has a firm hold of it, and therefore he is luminous. When his imagination wells up, it overflows in ornament; when his heart is touched, it thrills along his verse. He always has the right word for the right idea, and never a word too much. If he is brief, it is because few words suffice; when he is



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lavish of them, still each word has its mark, and aids, not embarrasses, the vigorous march of his elocution. He expresses what all feel, but all can not say; and his sayings pass into proverbs among his people, and his phrases become household words and idioms of their daily speech, which is tessellated with the rich fragments of his language, as we see in foreign lands the marbles of Roman grandeur worked into the walls and pavements of modern palaces. Such preeminently is Shakespeare among ourselves; such preeminently Vergil among the Latins; such in their degree are all those writers who in every nation go by the name of classics. To particular nations they are necessarily attached from the circumstance of the variety of tongues, and the peculiarities of each; but so far they have a catholic and ecumenical character that what they express is common to the whole race of man, and they alone are able to express it. If then the power of speech is a gift as great as any that can be named; if the origin of language is by many philosophers even considered to be nothing short of divine; if by means of words the secrets of the heart are brought to light, pain of soul is relieved, hidden grief is carried off, sympathy conveyed, counsel imparted, experience recorded, and wisdom perpetuated; if by great authors the many are drawn up into unity, national character is fixt, a people

speaks, the past and the future, the East and the West, are brought into communication with each other; if such men are, in a word, the spokesmen and prophets of the human family, then it will not answer to make light of literature or to neglect its study; rather we may be sure that, in proportion as we master it in whatever language, and imbibe its spirit, we shall ourselves become in our own measure the ministers of like benefits to others, be they many or few, be they in the obscurer or the more distinguished walks of life, who are united to us by social ties and are within the sphere of our personal influence.

NEWMAN

### BUNYAN'S STYLE

The style of Bunyan is delightful to every reader, and invaluable as a study to every person who wishes to obtain a wide command over the English language. His vocabulary is the vocabulary of the common people. There is not an expression, if we except a few terms of theology, which would puzzle the rudest peasant. We have observed several pages which do not contain a single word of more than two syllables. Yet, no writer has said more exactly what he wanted to say. For magnificence, for pathos, for vehement exhor-

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tation, for subtle disquisition, for every purpose of the poet, the orator, and the divine, this homely dialect, this dialect of plain working men, was sufficient.

MACAULAY

### HOW TO READ A BOOK

Always look into your dish and taste it, before you begin to eat. As you sit down, examine the title-page; see who wrote the book—where he lives; do you know anything of the author? where, and by whom published? Do you know anything of the general character of the books published by this publisher? Recollect what you have heard about this book. Then read the preface, to see what kind of a bow the author makes, and what he thinks of himself and his work: why he has the boldness to challenge the public to hear him. Then turn to the contents, see what are the great divisions of his subject, and thus get a glance of his general plan. Then take a single chapter or section, and see how he has divided and filled that up. If, now, you wish to taste the dish before further examination of the contents, then turn to the place where some important point is discussed, and where some valuable thought professes to be expanded or illustrated, and see how it is executed. If, after some few



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such trials, you should find your author obscure, dull, pedantic, or shallow, you need not longer fish in these waters. It will be hard to catch fish here, and, when caught, they will be too small for use. But if you find the author valuable, and worth your attention, then go back to the contents. Examine them chapter by chapter; then close the book, and see if you have the plan of the whole work distinctly and fully in your mind. Do not proceed till this is done. After you have this map all distinctly drawn in the mind, then get the first chapter vividly before you, so far as the contents will enable you to do it. Now proceed to read. At the close of each sentence, ask yourself, "Do I understand that? Is it true, important, or to the point? Anything valuable there which I ought to retain?" At the close of each paragraph, ask the same questions. Leave no paragraph till you have the substance of it in your mind. Proceed in this manner through the chapter; and, at the close of the chapter, look back, and see what the author tried to accomplish by it, and what he really has accomplished.

JOHN TODD

## **WRITING AND READING**

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### **STYLE IS FOUNDED UPON TRUTH**

The well-written works are the only ones that will go down to posterity; the amount of knowledge in a book, the peculiarity of the facts, the novelty even of the discoveries, are not sure warrants of immortality. If the works that contain these are concerned with only minor objects; if they are written without taste, without nobility, without inspiration, they will perish; since the knowledge, facts, and discoveries, being easily detached, are passed on to others, and even gain intrinsically when appropriated by more gifted hands. These things are external to the man; the style is the man himself. Style, then, can be neither detached, nor transferred, nor altered by time: if it is elevated, noble, sublime, the author will be admired equally in all ages. For it is truth alone that is permanent, that is even eternal. Now a beautiful style is such in fact only by the infinite number of truths that it presents. All the intellectual graces residing in it, all the interdependences of which it is composed, are truths not less useful, and for the human spirit possibly more precious, than those, whatever they be, that form the core of the subject.

**BUFFON**

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**EMPLOY REPETITION WHEN  
NECESSARY**

The best general rule for avoiding the disadvantages both of conciseness and of prolixity is to employ repetition: to repeat, that is, the same sentiment and argument in many different forms of expression; each, in itself brief, but all, together, affording such an expansion of the sense to be conveyed, and so detaining the mind upon it, as the case may require. Cicero among the ancients, and Burke among the modern writers, afford, perhaps, the most abundant practical exemplifications of this rule. The latter sometimes shows a deficiency in correct taste, but it must be admitted that he seldom fails to make himself thoroughly understood, and does not often weary the attention, even when he offends the taste, of his readers.

**WHATELY****AVOID STIFFNESS OF STYLE**

At the same time, while I recommend precision both of thought and expression, I am far from advocating a pedantic niceness in the choice of language: such a course would only render conversation stiff and stilted. Dr. Johnson used to say that in the most unre-



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strained discourse he always sought for the properest word—that which best and most exactly conveyed his meaning; to a certain point he was right, but because he carried it too far, he was often laborious where he ought to have been light, and formal where he ought to have been familiar. Men ought to endeavor to distinguish subtly, that they may be able afterward to assimilate truly.

COLERIDGE

## **SOUNDS AND SENSE RELATED**

Sounds as well as thoughts have relation both between each other and toward that which they represent, and a perception of the order of those relations has always been found connected with a perception of the order of relations of thoughts. Hence the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence, than the words themselves, without reference to that peculiar order. Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principal of its color and odor, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet.

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The plant must spring again from its seed,  
or it will bear no flower—and this is the bur-  
den of the curse of Babel.

**SHELLEY**

### **AVOID PRETENTIOUSNESS**

Nothing is more opposed to the beauty of naturalness than the pains people take to express ordinary, every-day matters with an air of singularity or pretense; nor is there anything more degrading to the writer. Far from admiring him for this, we may pity him for having spent so much time in making new combinations of syllables, merely to say what everybody else has said already. This is the fault of minds that are cultivated but sterile; they have words in abundance, but no ideas. Accordingly, they juggle with diction, and fancy that they have put together ideas, because they have been arranging phrases, and that they have refined the language, when they have really corrupted it by warping the accepted forms. Such writers have no style; or, if you wish, they have only its shadow. A style ought to mean the engraving of thoughts; whereas they only know how to trace out words.

**BUFFON**

## WRITING AND READING

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### THE BEAUTIFUL IN WRITING

The term beauty, as applied to writing, is often used with but little definite meaning. When we speak of a beautiful sonnet, letter, or oration, we mean simply one that is well composed; that is agreeable, wither by reason of the sentiment it embodies, or the style in which it is exprest. But, properly speaking, this term has a more limited signification; being applied, not to what is impassioned, sparkling, vehement, or elevated, but to all that raises in the reader a gentle, placid emotion, similar to that produced by the contemplation of beauty in natural objects. The beauty in writing is not confined to descriptions of attractive external objects, but extends to all subjects except those of an abstract or elevated character. It does not, like sublimity, exclude ornament, or require plainness of words; nor is it necessarily confined to occasional passages. It may characterize an author's style throughout. Among the ancients, Vergil is as much distinguished for the beauty of his periods as Homer is for the sublimity of his conceptions. So, Cicero's orations have more of the beautiful than the sublime; in this latter quality they are surpassed by those of Demosthenes. Among moderns, Fénelon and Lamartine in French,



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Addison in English, and Irving in American, literature possess those various graces of composition which constitute the beautiful.

G. P. QUACKENBOS

**DESCRIPTIVE WRITING**

In studying any interesting scene, let your mind look carefully at all the details. You will then become conscious of one or more effects or impressions that have been made upon you. Discover what these impressions are. Then group and describe in order the details which tend to produce each of the impressions. You will then find that you have comprized in your description all the important details of the scene. As an instance, let us suppose that a writer is out in the country on a morning toward the end of May, and wishes to describe the multitudinous objects which delight his senses. First of all, he ascertains that the general impressions produced on his mind by the summer landscape are the ideas of luxuriance, brightness, and joy. He then proceeds to describe in these groups the details which produce these impressions. He first takes up the luxuriant features: the springing young crops of grain completely hiding the red soil; the rich, living carpet of grass and flowers covering the meadows; the hedge-rows on each side of the way, in their bright summer green; the trees

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bending gracefully under the full weight of their foliage; and the wild plants, those waifs of nature, flourishing everywhere, smothering the woodland brook, filling up each scar and crevice in the rock, and making a rich fringe along the side of every highway and foot-path. He then descants upon the brightness of the landscape: the golden sunshine; the pearly dew-drops hanging on the tips of every blade of grass, and sparkling in the morning rays; the clusters of daisies dappling the pasture-land; the dandelion glowing under the very foot of the traveler; the chestnut-trees, like great candelabra, stuck all over with white lights, lighting up the woodlands; and lilacs, laburnums, and hawthorns in full flower, making the farmer's garden one mass of variegated blossom. And last of all, he can dwell upon the joy that is abroad the face of the earth; the little birds so full of one feeling that they can only trill it forth in the same delicious monotone; the lark bounding into the air, as if eager and quivering to proclaim his joy to the whole world; the humble bee humming his satisfaction as he revels among the flowers; and the myriads of insects floating in the air, and poising, and darting with drowsy buzz through the floods of golden sunshine. Thus we see that, by this habit of generalizing, the mind can grasp the details of almost any scene.

DAVID PRYDE

## THE STUDY OF HISTORY

In studying the lives of great men, we get the accumulated wisdom of the past. In plainer language, we get a knowledge of history. There was once an old Grecian king named Danaus. He had fifty daughters, and forty-nine of these in one night murdered their husbands. For this, after death, they were condemned in the infernal regions to fill buckets of water. But the buckets were full of holes, the water ran out as fast as it was poured in, and they are still engaged in their hopeless task. This old legend seems to us to be an emblem of the teaching of history. The buckets are the minds of the pupils. The liquid poured in is the milk-and-watery information that goes by the name of historical knowledge. And the daughters of Danaus are the teachers of history. What crime they have committed to be condemned to such a thankless task, we know not. But there they are, incessantly pouring into the youthful minds facts and dates, and then finding, when they look into the minds, nothing but emptiness. It is difficult to detect among the mass of people any knowledge of history whatever. To most the past is utterly dark and dead; and they can not be said, in the words of Shakespeare, to be "endowed with large discourse of reason, looking before and after."



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Now, Providence has provided a remedy for this great general shortcoming. He has supplied a short, easy, and simple method of learning history. The great men of each age have been endowed with such wide sympathy and such strong capacity that they absorb all the information of that age. There is not an important fact or sentiment which is not to be found in them. There is not an important action in which they do not play a part. They are the embodiment of all that is valuable in that age. They are history incarnate. And instead of losing ourselves in the labyrinths of small facts and names which make up ordinary chronicles, we can get, in the lives of great men, all the main incidents of the time strung like pearls upon the golden thread of their own personal career.

SAMUEL SMILES

## **SIMPLICITY RECOMMENDED**

When a man's thoughts are clear, the properest words will generally offer themselves first, and his own judgment will direct him in what order to place them, so as they may be best understood. Where men err against this method, it is usually on purpose, and to show their learning, their oratory, their politeness, or their knowledge of the world. In short, that simplicity without which no human

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performance can arrive to any great perfection is nowhere more eminently useful than in this.

**JONATHAN SWIFT**

### **STYLE ARISES FROM THOUGHT**

Style is simply the order and movement one gives to one's thoughts. If these are connected closely, and rigorously compressed, the style will be firm, nervous, and concise. If they are allowed to follow one another loosely and merely at the lead of the diction, however choice this be, the style will be diffuse, nerveless, and languid.

**BUFFON**

### **CHANGES OF STYLE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE**

Such change as really took place in the style of our literature after Chaucer's time is with difficulty perceptible, on account of the dearth of writers, during the civil wars of the fifteenth century. But the transition was not very great; and accordingly we find in Lattimer and our other venerable authors about the time of Edward VI, as in Luther, the general characteristics of the earliest manner; that is, every part popular, and the discourse addressed to all degrees of intellect; the sen-

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tences short, the tone vehement, and the connection of the whole produced by honesty and singleness of purpose, intensity of passion, and pervading importance of the subject.

Another and a very different species of style is that which was derived from, and founded on, the admiration and cultivation of the classical writers, and which was more exclusively addrest to the learned class in society. I have previously mentioned Boccaccio as the original Italian introducer of this manner, and the great models of it in English are Hooker, Bacon, Milton, and Taylor, altho it may be traced in many other authors of that age. In all these the language is dignified but plain, genuine English, altho elevated and brightened by superiority of intellect in the writer. Individual words themselves are always used by them in their precise meaning, without either affectation or slipslop. The letters and state papers of Sir Francis Walsingham are remarkable for excellence in style of this description. In Jeremy Taylor the sentences are often extremely long, and yet are generally so perspicuous in consequence of their logical structure, that they require no repusal to be understood; and it is for the most part the same in Milton and Hooker. . . .

The unity in these writers is produced by the unity of the subject, and the perpetual growth and evolution of the thoughts, one generating, and explaining, and justifying,



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the place of another, not, as it is in Seneca, where the thoughts, striking as they are, are merely strung together like beads, without any causation or progression. The words are selected because they are the most appropriate, regard being had to the dignity of the total impression, and no merely big phrases are used where plain ones would have sufficed, even in the most learned of their works.

There is some truth in a remark, which I believe was made by Sir Joshua Reynolds, that the greatest man is he who forms the taste of a nation, and that the next greatest is he who corrupts it. The true classical style of Hooker and his fellows was easily open to corruption; and Sir Thomas Brown it was, who, tho a writer of great genius, first effectually injured the literary taste of the nation by his introduction of learned words, merely because they were learned. . . . But Sir Thomas Brown with all his faults had a genuine idiom; and it is the existence of an individual idiom in each, that makes the principal writers before the Restoration the great patterns of integers of English style. In them the precise intended meaning of a word can never be mistaken; whereas in the later writers, as especially in Pope, the use of words is for the most part purely arbitrary, so that the context will rarely show the true specific sense, but only that something of the sort is designed. A perusal of the authorities cited

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by Johnson in his dictionary under any leading word, will give you a lively sense of this declension in etymological truth of expression in the writers after the Restoration, or perhaps, strictly, after the middle of the reign of Charles II.

The general characteristic of the style of our literature down to the period which I have just mentioned, was gravity, and in Milton and some other writers of his day there are perceptible traces of the sternness of republicanism. Soon after the Restoration a material change took place, and the cause of royalism was graced, sometimes disgraced, by every shade of lightness of manner. A free and easy style was considered as a test of loyalty, or at all events, as a badge of the cavalier party; you may detect it occasionally even in Barrow, who is, however, in general remarkable for dignity and logical sequency of expression. . . . From the common opinion that the English style attained its greatest perfection in and about Queen Anne's reign I altogether dissent; not only because it is in one species alone in which it can be pretended that the writers of that age excelled their predecessors, but also because the specimens themselves are not equal, upon sound principles of judgment, to much that has been produced before. The classical structure of Hooker—the impetus, thought-agglomerating, flood of Taylor—to these there is no pretense

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of a parallel; and for mere ease and grace, is Cowley inferior to Addison, being, as he is, much more thoughtful and full of fancy? Cowley, with the omission of a quaintness here and there, is probably the best model of style for modern imitation in general. Taylor's periods have been frequently attempted by his admirers; you may, perhaps, just catch the turn of a simile or single image, but to write in the real manner of Jeremy Taylor would require as mighty a mind as his. Many parts of Algernon Sidney's treatises afford excellent examples of a good modern practical style; and Dryden in his prose works is a still better model, if you add a stricter and purer grammar. It is, indeed, worthy of remark that all our great poets have been good prose writers, as Chaucer, Spenser, Milton; and this probably arose from their just sense of meter. For a true poet will never confound verse and prose; whereas it is almost characteristic of indifferent prose writers that they should be constantly slipping into scraps of meter. Swift's style is, in its line, perfect; the manner is a complete expression of the matter, the terms appropriate, and the artifice concealed. It is simplicity in the true sense of the word.

After the Revolution, the spirit of the nation became much more commercial, than it had been before; a learned body or clerisy, as such, gradually disappeared, and literature



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in general began to be address to the common miscellaneous public. That public had become accustomed to, and required, a strong stimulus; and to meet the requisitions of the public taste, a style was produced which by combining triteness of thought with singularity and excess of manner of expression, was calculated at once to soothe ignorance and to flatter vanity. The thought was carefully kept down to the immediate apprehension of the commonest understanding, and the dress was as anxiously arranged for the purpose of making the thought appear something very profound. The essence of this style consisted in a mock antithesis, that is, an opposition of mere sounds, in a rage for personification, the abstract made animate, far-fetched metaphors, strange phrases, metrical scraps, in everything, in short, but genuine prose. Style is, of course, nothing else but the art of conveying the meaning appropriately and with perspicuity, whatever that meaning may be, and one criterion of style is that it shall not be translatable without injury to the meaning. Johnson's style has pleased many from the very fault of being perpetually translatable; he creates an impression of cleverness by never saying anything in a common way. The best specimen of this manner is in Junius, because his antithesis is less merely verbal than Johnson's. Gibbon's manner is the worst of all; it has every fault of which this peculiar

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style is capable. Tacitus is an example of it in Latin; in coming from Cicero you feel the falsetto immediately.

In order to form a good style, the primary rule and condition is, not to attempt to express ourselves in language before we thoroughly know our own meaning; when a man perfectly understands himself appropriate diction will generally be at his command either in writing or speaking. In such cases the thoughts and the words are associated. In the next place preciseness in the use of terms is required, and the test is whether you can translate the phrase adequately into simpler terms, regard being had to the feeling of the whole passage. Try this upon Shakespeare, or Milton, and see if you can substitute other simpler words in any given passage without a violation of the meaning or tone. The source of bad writing is the desire to be something more than a man of sense—the straining to be thought a genius; and it is just the same in speech-making. If men would only say what they have to say in plain terms, how much more eloquent they would be! Another rule is to avoid converting mere abstractions into persons. I believe you will very rarely find in any great writer before the Revolution the possessive case of an inanimate noun used in prose instead of the dependent case, as “the watch’s hand,” for “the hand of the watch.” The possessive

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or Saxon genitive was confined to persons, or at least to animated subjects. And I can not conclude this lecture without insisting on the importance of accuracy of style as being near akin to veracity and truthful habits of mind; he who thinks loosely will write loosely, and, perhaps, there is some moral inconvenience in the common forms of our grammars which give children so many obscure terms for material distinctions. Let me also exhort you to careful examination of what you read, if it be worth any perusal at all; such examination will be a safeguard from fanaticism, the universal origin of which is in the contemplation of phenomena without investigation into their causes.

COLERIDGE

### EGOTISM IN WRITING

It is observable, that the writers of memoirs and essays are chiefly subject to this frothy distemper. Nor can it be doubted that this is the true reason why these gentlemen entertain the world so lavishly with what relates to themselves. For having had no opportunity of privately conversing with themselves, or exercising their own genius, so as to make acquaintance with it, or prove its strength; they immediately fall to work in a wrong place, and exhibit on the stage of the world that practise which they should have



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kept to themselves; if they designed that either they, or the world, should be the better for their moralities. Who indeed can endure to hear an empiric talk of his own constitution, how he governs and manages it, what diet agrees best with it, and what his practise is with himself? The proverb, no doubt, is very just, "Physician, cure thyself." Yet, methinks, one should have but an ill time, to be present at these bodily operations. Nor is the reader in truth any better entertained, when he is obliged to assist at the experimental discussions of his practising author, who all the while is in reality doing no better than taking his physie in public.

For this reason I hold it very indecent for any one to publish his meditations, occasional reflections, solitary thoughts, or other such exercises as come under the notion of this self-discoursing practise. And the modestest title I can conceive for such works, would be that of a certain author who called them his crudities. . . . For so public-spirited they are, that they can never afford themselves the least time to think in private, for their own particular benefit and use. For this reason, tho they are often retired, they are never by themselves. The world is ever of the party. They have their author-character in view, and are always considering how this or that thought would serve to complete some set of contemplations, or furnish out the com-

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mon-place book, from whence these treasured riches are to flow in plenty on the necessitous world.

But if our candidates for authorship happen to be of the sanctified kind, it is not to be imagined how much farther still their charity is apt to extend. So exceeding great is their indulgence and tenderness for mankind, that they are unwilling the least sample of their devout exercise should be lost. Tho there are already so many formularies and rituals appointed for this species of soliquy; they can allow nothing to lie concealed, which passes in this religious commerce and way of dialog between them and their soul.

These may be termed a sort of pseudo-ascetics, who can have no real converse with themselves, or with heaven; while they look thus asquint upon the world, and carry titles and editions along with them in their meditations. And altho the books of this sort, by a common idiom, are called good books; the authors, for certain, are a very sorry race; for religious crudities are undoubtedly the worst of any. A saint-author of all men least values politeness. He scorns to confine that spirit in which he writes, to rules of criticism and profane learning. Nor is he inclined in any respect to play the critic on himself, or regulate his style of language by the standard of good company, and people of the better sort. He is above the consideration of that which in

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a narrow sense we call manners. Nor is he apt to examine any other faults than those which he calls sins; tho a sinner against good breeding, and the laws of decency, will no more be esteemed a good author, than will a sinner against grammar, good argument, or good sense. And if moderation and temper are not of the party with a writer, let his cause be ever so good, I doubt whether he will be able to recommend it with great advantage to the world. . . .

A remarkable instance of the want of this sovereign remedy may be drawn from our common great talkers, who engross the greatest part of the conversations of the world, and are the forwardest to speak in public assemblies. Many of these have a sprightly genius, attended with a mighty heat and ebullition of fancy. But it is a certain observation in our science, that they who are great talkers in company have never been any talkers by themselves, nor used to these private discussions of our home-regimen. For which reason their froth abounds. Nor can they discharge anything without some mixture of it. But when they carry their attempts beyond ordinary discourse, and would rise to the capacity of authors, the case grows worse with them. Their page can carry none of the advantages of their person. They can no way bring into paper those airs they give themselves in discourse. The turns of voice and



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action, with which they help out many a lame thought and incoherent sentence, must here be laid aside; and the speech taken to pieces, compared together, and examined from head to foot. So that unless the party has been used to play the critic thoroughly upon himself, he will hardly be found proof against the criticisms of others. His thoughts can never appear very correct, unless they have been used to sound correction by themselves, and been well formed and disciplined before they are brought into the field. It is the hardest thing in the world to be a good thinker, without being a strong self-examiner, and thorough-paced dialogist, in this solitary way.

LORD SHAFTESBURY

## **SIMPLICITY AND REFINEMENT IN WRITING**

Fine writing, according to Addison, consists of sentiments which are natural, without being obvious. There can not be a juster and more concise definition of fine writing.

Sentiments which are merely natural affect not the mind with any pleasure, and seem not worthy of our attention. The pleasantries of a waterman, the observations of a peasant, the ribaldry of a porter or hackney coachman, all of these are natural and disagreeable. What an insipid comedy should we

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make of the chit-chat of the tea-table, copied faithfully and at full length? Nothing can please persons of taste, but nature drawn with all her graces and ornaments, la belle nature; or if we copy low life, the strokes must be strong and remarkable, and must convey a lively image to the mind. The absurd naïveté of Sancho Panza is represented in such inimitable colors by Cervantes that it entertains as much as the picture of the most magnanimous hero or the softest lover.

The case is the same with orators, philosophers, critics, or any author who speaks in his own person, without introducing other speakers or actors. If his language be not elegant, his observations uncommon, his sense strong and masculine, he will in vain boast his nature and simplicity. He may be correct; but he never will be agreeable. It is the unhappiness of such authors that they are never blamed or censured. The good fortune of a book, and that of a man, are not the same. The secret-deceiving path of life, which Horace talks of "*fallentis semita vitæ*," may be the happiest lot of the one; but it is the greatest misfortune which the other can possibly fall into.

On the other hand, productions which are merely surprizing, without being natural, can never give any lasting entertainment to the mind. To draw chimeras is not, properly speaking, to copy or imitate. The justness

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of representation is lost, and the mind displeased to find a picture which bears no resemblance to any original. Nor are such excessive refinements more agreeable in the epistolary or philosophic style than in the epic or tragic. Too much ornament is a fault in every kind of production. Uncommon expressions, strong flashes of wit, pointed similes, and epigrammatic turns, especially when they recur too frequently, are a disfigurement rather than any embellishment of discourse. As the eye, in surveying a Gothic building, is distracted by the multiplicity of ornaments, and loses the whole by a minute attention to the parts; so the mind, in perusing a work overstocked with wit, is fatigued and disgusted with the constant endeavor to shine and surprize. This is the case where a writer overabounds in wit, even tho that wit in itself should be just and agreeable. But it commonly happens to such writers that they seek for their favorite ornaments, even where the subject does not afford them; and by that means have twenty insipid conceits for one thought which is really beautiful.

There is no object in critical learning more copious than this of the just mixture of simplicity and refinement in writing; and therefore, not to wander in too large a field, I shall confine myself to a few general observations on that head.

I. I observe that tho excesses of both kinds



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are to be avoided, and tho a proper medium ought to be studied in all productions, yet this medium lies not in a point, but admits of a considerable latitude. Consider the wide distance, in this respect, between Pope and Lucretius. These seem to lie in the two greatest extremes of refinement and simplicity in which a poet can indulge himself, without being guilty of any blamable excess. All this interval may be filled with poets, who may differ from each other, but may be equally admirable, each in his peculiar style and manner. Corneille and Congreve, who carry their wit and refinement somewhat further than Pope (if poets of so different a kind can be compared together), and Sophocles and Terence, who are more simple than Lucretius, seem to have gone out of that medium, in which the most perfect productions are found, and to be guilty of some excess in these opposite characters. Of all the great poets, Vergil and Racine, in my opinion, lie nearest the center, and are the furthest removed from both the extremities.

II. My observations on this head is that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to explain by words where the just medium lies between the excesses of simplicity and refinement, or to give any rule by which we can know precisely the bounds between the fault and the beauty. A critic may not only discourse very judiciously on this head without

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instructing his readers, but even without understanding the matter perfectly himself. There is not a finer piece of criticism than the "Dissertation on Pastorals," by Fontenelle; in which, by a number of reflections and philosophical reasonings, he endeavors to fix the just medium which is suitable to that species of writing. But let any one read the pastorals of that author, and he will be convinced that this judicious critic, notwithstanding his fine reasonings, had a false taste, and fixt the point of perfection much nearer the extreme of refinement than pastoral poetry will admit of. The sentiments of his shepherds are better suited to the toilettes of Paris than to the forests of Arcadia. But this it is impossible to discover from his critical reasonings. He blames all excessive painting and ornament as much as Vergil could have done, had that great poet written a dissertation on this species of poetry. However different the tastes of men their general discourse on these subjects is commonly the same. No criticism can be instructive which descends not to particulars, and is not full of examples and illustrations. It is allowed on all hands that beauty, as well as virtue, always lies in a medium; but where this medium is placed is a great question, and can never be sufficiently explained by general reasonings.

III. I shall deliver on this subject: That we ought to be more on our guard against

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the excess of refinement than that of simplicity; and that because the former excess is both less beautiful and more dangerous than the latter.

It is a certain rule that wit and passion are entirely incompatible. When the affections are moved there is no place for the imagination. The mind of man being naturally limited, it is impossible that all its faculties can operate at once: and the more any one predominates, the less room is there for the others to exert their vigor. For this reason a greater simplicity is required in all compositions, where men and actions and passions are painted, than in such as consist of reflections and observations. And, as the former species of writing is the more engaging and beautiful, one may safely, upon this account, give the preference to the extreme of simplicity above that of refinement.

We may also observe that those compositions which we read the oftenest, and which every man of taste has got by heart, have the recommendation of simplicity, and have nothing surprizing in the thought, when divested of that elegance of expression, and harmony of numbers, with which it is clothed. If the merit of the composition lie in a point of wit, it may strike at first; but the mind anticipates the thought in the second perusal, and is no longer affected by it. When I read an epigram of Martial, the first line recalls



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the whole; and I have no pleasure in repeating to myself what I know already. But each line, each word in Catullus, has its merit; and I am never tired with the perusal of him. It is sufficient to run over Cowley once; but Parnel, after the fiftieth reading, is as fresh as at the first. Besides, it is with books as with women, where a certain plainness of manner and dress is more engaging, than the glare of paint, and airs, and apparel, which may dazzle the eye, but reaches not the affections. Terence is a modest and bashful beauty, to whom we grant everything, because he assumes nothing, and whose purity and nature makes a durable tho not a violent impression on us.

But refinement, as it is the less beautiful, so is it the more dangerous extreme, and what we are the aptest to fall into. Simplicity passes for dulness, when it is not accompanied with great elegance and propriety. On the contrary, there is something surprizing in a blaze of wit and conceit. Ordinary readers are mightily struck with it, and falsely imagine it to be the most difficult, as well as most excellent way of writing. Seneca abounds with agreeable faults, says Quintilian, "*abundat dulcibus vitiis*"; and for that reason is the more dangerous, and the more apt to pervert the taste of the young and the inconsiderate.

I shall add that the excess of refinement

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is now more to be guarded against than ever; because it is the extreme which men are the most apt to fall into, after learning has made some progress, and after eminent writers have appeared in every species of composition. The endeavor to please by novelty leads men wide of simplicity and nature, and fills their writings with affectation and conceit. It was thus the Asiatic eloquence degenerated so much from the Attic. It was thus the age of Claudius and Nero became so much inferior to that of Augustus in taste and genius. And perhaps there are at present some symptoms of a like degeneracy of taste in France as well as in England.

DAVID HUME.

















